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CROSS SECTION 1948

A collection of
new American writing
edited by

EDWIN SEAVER

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FOREWORD

THIS IS *the fourth volume in the* Cross Section *series, an annual collection of new American writing. As I have already explained in the introductory notes to the preceding volumes, by "new writing" I mean simply writing here presented for the first time, not selected from work previously published in books or magazines. I cannot hope that this plain restatement of purpose will deter some readers from again taking me to task for using the term "new writing" in ways quite foreign to my intention. On the contrary, I can look forward with reasonable assurance to being advised that Jessamyn West, for instance, is not a new writer, or that none of the writing in the present book is really new, that is fashionable or experimental. Such writing can safely be left to the coteries, which have a kind of vested interest in it. Alas! in this year of literary drought, even our coteries seem to have dried up.*

With the appearance of each successive volume in the Cross Section *series I am admonished anew, in some quarters, for the kind of stories I have selected, as if I had a special predilection for the morbid and the perverse, the grim and the sordid, and was determined rigidly to exclude anything that depicted the more smiling aspects of American life. This is an old and threadbare charge that goes back considerably further in our literature than* Cross Section. *The only reason I rise to object at this late date is to clarify my editorial objective. The aim of* Cross Section *is not to create a school of writers or present any one segment of contemporary American writing, but to do exactly what the name implies, and that is to show a cross section of what our writers, principally our younger writers, are currently thinking and feeling. Naturally the picture is not complete, but it can be fairly indicative.*

If this is so, then we can rejoice that this year, for the first time, Cross Section *is able to offer its readers an extensive essay in humor. It is high time that we Americans lost our unbecoming self-righteousness and learned again how to laugh at ourselves, and this, I think, is what Miss West has encouraged in her delightfully penetrating satire,* "The Pismire Plan." *I have been aware, no less than my critics, of the almost total lack of humorous writing in the previous* Cross Section *volumes. Let us* *hope* "The Pismire Plan" *will open up a new and badly needed road in our literary landscape.*

There is nothing very funny, however, about the picture of American literature as a whole in the past year, and here again the manuscripts submitted to Cross Section, *both in quantity and quality, reflected the prevailing situation. They were fewer in number—some two thousand less than the previous year—and they showed, on the whole, less creative diversity and vitality. It is but cold comfort to realize that this was not the editorial experience of* Cross Section *alone; any book editor, any book critic, must have been aware of the same general conditions.*

I am reminded of a story James Thurber once told about his own drawings. It occurred to him one day that his drawings were improving and he mentioned this to a fellow editor on The New Yorker*—I think it was E. B. White. "Don't say that, Jim," said Mr. White. "If you improve you'll be mediocre." Or words to that effect. With all due respect for Mr. Thurber's drawings, which I genuinely admire, one felt somewhat the same way about our literature of the past year; if it improved any it might become mediocre. Would that it operated from the same primitive instinctual base as Mr. Thurber's drawings, which I imagine is what Mr. White was referring to.*

Lest the above paragraphs be construed as poor salesmanship for Cross Section 1948, *I hasten to add that present company is not included. I have referred only to the general level of the manuscripts submitted, not to the particular manuscripts accepted for publication. My own feeling is that Miss West's satire and Robert Lowry's* "The Wolf That Fed Us," *together with at least half a dozen other stories, the chapter from Norman Mailer's forthcoming first novel and the two critical essays, would make* Cross Section 1948 *a distinguished book in any year.*

Our publishers seem to be in pretty general agreement on at least one point about the books they issued in the past twelve months: the people weren't buying enough of them. This dereliction on the part of the public was attributed in part to high prices due to rising production costs. Money was tighter; people just didn't have as much of it to spend on books. But if you don't particularly want a book it is still too expensive even at half the price, and perhaps it would be wise to see in the descending curve on the sales chart a kind of literary criticism our critics have failed to provide. Maybe the people simply weren't interested in the books being offered them. With water, water everywhere and hardly *a drop to drink—you could count the worthwhile books of an entire year on the fingers of your two hands—the people were making do with naïve historical romances (there is always need for entertainment) and wishful thinking about their state of mind (there is always the urge for self-improvement). However, the publishers can hardly be blamed for not publishing books that were not being written.*

It is worth noting here that the two successful novels which attempted to come to grips with contemporary American problems—the problem of anti-Semitism in the case of Laura Hobson's Gentleman's Agreement *and the Negro problem in Sinclair Lewis'* Kingsblood Royal*—both had escape clauses written into them. Miss Hobson's hero was only pretending to be a Jew, and Mr. Lewis' hero, realistically if not actually, was only playing at being a Negro. They both had outs, if they wanted to use them. If Miss Hobson's hero had been born a Jew and if Mr. Lewis' hero had begun by being a Negro—and no exit possible in either case, anywhere or at any time—it would have been a different story. But why be a morbid bore when you can be a clever success? It is all a little, shall we say, on the advertising level of consciousness, which is somewhat lower than the level on which a genuine literature is created.*

In an article in Life *(August 29, 1947) on American writers, John Chamberlain suggested what is probably true, even though it has been said before: the literary revolution which began in the second decade of the present century and flourished in the twenties and thirties, is at an end. Mr. Chamberlain, however, was not too pessimistic. Relying on the good old "will-to-believe," he asserted that "sometime in the future" we would discover, or rediscover, "a number of worthy purposes" and this, presumably, would be the spark plug of a new wave of creative energy. "The individual is incorrigible, and at the count of nine he usually comes up off the floor, swinging wildly but swinging hard."*

Usually—except when, as often happens, he stays down for the count of ten. And except for the fact that, even in the vague future, the discovery of worthy purposes does not come about in a vacuum. If one is looking for a sign of our present cultural impoverishment he need go no further than Mr. Chamberlain's Micawberish statement of faith that something is bound to turn up tomorrow, when what he is saying plainly enough is that today's cupboard is very bare indeed and he has no idea of how to replenish it. At least he expresses no idea.

Which is strange, since he quite accurately recalls the climate of the *literary upsurge in the Teens—the intellectual and social ferment that gave birth to the little magazines and the radical magazines, the young people throwing themselves into settlement work, or "providing support for the picket lines of the labor movement," or joining the Socialist "revolution," etc., in short, the movement back to the people. If "the America of the Teens was searches," as Mr. Chamberlain says, it was also, as he implies, the spirit of revolt. But such is hardly the climate of America today, and our literature shows the effects of it.*

Today we seem to be hell-bent for conformity, "loyalty" and general intellectual mousiness in the name of democracy, although hysteria would seem to be the more precise word. But freedom and truth, the courage to demand the one and to express the other, have nothing to do with all that. Freedom and truth—these are the worthy purposes our writers must rediscover, not "sometime in the future," but now.

In closing, I want to express my thanks to Miss Marjorie Stengel for her invaluable editorial assistance in preparing the present volume of Cross Section *as well as the preceding volumes.*

EDWIN SEAVER

January 13, 1948.

THE PISMIRE PLAN

by Jessamyn West

The Pismire Plan has been so successful—though success is the wrong word to use here, one does not speak of gravity as being successful—that the people in their new content tend to forget the man responsible for it—George H. Pismire.

Pain we remember, and unhappiness. And those who gave us pain and made us unhappy we remember forever, to curse. The villain becomes the hero, the story of his exploits told and retold. The good man is forgotten, and the happiness he gave us seems, with the passage of time, an old story, scarcely worth speaking of. And while this is admittedly natural it is not just. It is not just that, accepting The Plan, we do not pause to reflect where we would be had George H. Pismire not had the faith, energy and capital necessary for the development of his first revolutionary but basically simple idea.

For basically it was so simple that later, in the midst of its gigantic ramifications, George Pismire would himself pause to wonder at his seedling's growth. Its growth, however, did not obscure his memory of its beginnings, he could recall exactly the day, the place, even the hour —when the Idea came to him—and he often spoke of that day and its events to Ada (his wife), and to the public at large in his speeches and broadcasts. He knew, for all The Plan was presently taken for granted, that subsequent generations would be deeply interested in the circumstances under which it was conceived. He knew that to Watt by his teakettle, Newton under his apple tree, Archimedes in his bath, would be added Pismire in his automobile. So, thinking historically and without a trace of egotism, George Pismire conscientiously saw to it that every fact, no matter how small, be made available for the recounting of his discovery and the development of The Plan.

After Depression II, George and Ada Pismire (with the Pismire fortune still intact) made a trip by motor to Ada's home state of California. They traveled very simply, George Pismire doing his own driving and both George and Ada trying to recapture something of their early days together when even so modest a trip would have been beyond their means. As a matter of fact, this effort to reactivate the past was nothing more than a sentimental gesture on their part since they enjoyed themselves and each day's travel without any reference to the past. George Pismire had a mind capable of detecting reality beneath appearance's contradictory shape; the discrepancies he saw kept him in a good humor, and his expatiations upon them pleased and amused Ada. So they traveled westward together, a husband and wife forty years married, actually no longer able to see each other but of sufficient faith that though they saw not, yet they believed, and spoke as to visible entities.

The Pismires reached the summit of Cajon Pass near dusk of an early September day and George stopped the car so that he and Ada might have a few minutes in which to relish the beauties which lay at their feet.

"Well," George asked, "how does it feel to get home?"

It felt very good. Ada, having been born in Southern California, had never been able to find in its climate or topography those exotic elements which newcomers from Iowa or New York find so strange and disturbing, that is so unlike anything to which forty or fifty years in Iowa or New York has accustomed them. Ada, as a matter of fact, was of the opinion that there was nothing in the world so exotic as a snowstorm, or sheet lightning, or even an eastern autumn, though easterners adjusted by a kind of imaginative protective coloration to their own phenomena looked at her blankly when she spoke of these things.

Thinking of this now she said to her husband, "It's not in the least exotic, is it, dear?"

George understood her at once. The orange groves lapped about in purple haze as though standing in an amethyst lake, the great boulevards humming with evening's traffic like stream beds carrying a phosphorescent current, the neon haze of the horizontal cities shallowly flooding their unrestricted areas, these did not seem exotic, a Hollywood backdrop. They were, instead, to Ada, the familiar face of home.

"What if people had flocked eastward these past few years, instead of westward?" Ada asked, still thinking of the snowstorms and the sheet lightning.

"You mean a handful of eastern natives," George asked, "and hordes of Californians moving in upon them? Saying, 'snow is too spectacular, too unreal, not in good taste. It's like a Hollywood set?' Is that what you mean?"

"Yes," said Ada, "it is. Easterners always talk as if our palm trees, our mountains . . ." she turned and indicated the vast bulk of old grayback darkening in shadows behind them, ". . . as if something smaller, more deciduous would be in better taste. The way old maids, when I was a girl, talked about husbands," she added in another of those bursts of remembering which had characterized their entire trip westward.

George laughed. He was both an easterner and a husband, but it was this streak of shrewd common sense in Ada which had drawn him to her from the first. After they had looked their fill George swung their car back onto the road and they dropped from the dry prick-needle warmth of the mountain side into the soft, milk-textured heat of the irrigated valleys.

As George fitted the car into the traffic's flow Ada said, "The strangest thing to me has always seemed these thousands of people . . . from somewhere else."

There seemed more thousands than usual, that first evening of the Pismires' return to California. Intent as he was upon the landscape itself and upon finding a suitable place to eat and spend the night, George Pismire was already noticing the people: the congestion of human beings that filled the cars, stood on street corners, lolled in the warm parks. No one was more aware than George Pismire of the flood of wartime workers to the Coast, and no one was more responsible for that flood. Over the Pismire Eartheater Plants at Burbank, Alameda and San Diego, the brown and yellow Eartheater signs proclaimed by day, what they blazed by night: "We Move the Earth." But neither George nor Ada had been West since the Big Pinch, as the man in the street, with the easy familiarity of those who know a thing by its feel, was calling Depression II. This was their first glimpse of those who had been taken from the swing and graveyard shifts, to be set loose in the night with their diminishing supply of money and their established nocturnal habits. The Idea at this time had not yet come to George Pismire. That night in the valley it was still twenty-four hours distant; but already in looking at this drift of faces, its outlines were beginning, dimly, to establish themselves in his mind.

The bright day folded like a lily. Night's husk rose from the earth and in darkness enclosed it. In the diminishing light, George Pismire continued to regard the faces. At crossroad service stations and beer joints they were lifted toward the Pismire car like clumps of bleached and dusty weeds; they clustered under street lamps like moths; they peered like masks from behind the windshields of the cars they drove. They were about, but not in the eating places the Pismires began to scan as night closed in.

"Why?" George asked. "Why are so few people inside, eating?"

"They haven't the money," said Ada, with her ready common sense.

"There's more to it than that," George replied, but what that more was, he wasn't yet able to say.

During their trip West the Pismires had eaten at obscure wayside cafés and taverns, at those places where there was the smallest chance that George's face, as well known as the President's and more loved, be recognized. Now they began to look about them for other such places. They had great choice. The boulevard was lined with establishments whose purpose it was to supply food to travelers.

"How about this?" George asked bringing the car to a standstill.

The eating place he indicated was shaped like a hungry head, an ingenious arrangement: white booths were teeth in the open mouth, steam and smoke from the kitchen issued from the nostrils, hair was simulated by a truly hirsute thatching: and loudspeakers, by some reverse logic, formed the ears, sending forth sound waves instead of receiving them. Inside this head, beyond the rows of white teeth, seemingly engulfed, but by some happy chance momentarily spared mastication, waitresses awaited customers. For despite the signs which had proclaimed for a mile, "Everyone Eats at the Big Mouth," the place was empty.

"It looks lonely," said Ada, so they drove on.

They passed an elongated building, brown and crusty as a bun and with a remarkably rosy and tender appearing frankfurter lodged between its bread-like roof and its similar appearing underpinning.

They passed a building which rose like Fujiama, very suddenly from the roadside's level to a duplication of Fujiama's snow-capped volcanic peak. "We Top Everything," the signs read. "Cheese on meat. Nuts on cheese. Olives on nuts. Avacados on olives. Passion fruit on avacados. Cream cheese on passion fruit. Honey on cream cheese. You guess what on Honey." The least coarseness always disturbed Ada and they drove on.

They passed Big Oranges, Little Mexicos, Italian Villas and a Chinese Village. They passed a Russian Samovar looking like a Russian Samovar, a Boston Bean Pot looking like a Boston Bean Pot and a Kansas Koffee Pot, looking—it had been crashed into by a Diesel-powered twelve-ton truck-and-trailer—like rubbish. They passed Old Cathay, New Harlem, and a somehow middle-aged, though not so designated, spot called simply, "Susy's Last Stand."

They passed Hash Homes, Fish Grottos, Soup Bowls, Bread Baskets and Beer Barrels. Once they passed a restaurant, but it was closed. They passed Chili Centers, Floating Gardens, Nut Houses, Chicken-in-the-Roughs, Fly Traps and Korn Kribs. They passed Taverns, Bars, Kitchens, Grills, Skillets and Stew Kettles. They passed Drop Inns, Flop Inns, Lunch Inns, Rush Inns, Break Inns and Come Ag-Inns.

The very profusion of choice bewildered them, and the evening was well advanced before George spied a place advertising fried frogs' legs, for which he had a weakness. They drove in and found a low, mossy edifice, speckled like a frog though shaped, with unexplained restraint, like a building. Over this dappled building water, which further dappled it, dripped constantly and about it a wide moat, whose glassy surface reflected the day's last light, and from whose gloomy depths echoed the cry of bullfrogs, curved.

"It isn't very cheerful, is it?" asked Ada who wasn't fond of frogs' legs, even when their owners were not near enough to make heard the mournful tones in which they seemed to lament the coming amputations.

George agreed. "It's a little like putting you down in the middle of the stockyards to await your steak."

It was a good deal worse than that as they at once discovered. The proprietor, a man whose bald pate seemed somehow luminous in the dusk, rushed out with flashlights and miniature harpoons.

"Hello folks," he cried with hearty good will, swinging open the door of the Pismire car, "here you are. Here's your lights and here's your spears. You just shine your lights in their eyes and when they bob up their heads to have a look, you pang 'em in their centers with these spears. Ten minutes later you can have them brown, hot and still squirming on your plates."

He shoved the spears into the Pismires' reluctant hands. "No," said George Pismire with that firmness with which subordinates in Pismire Inc. were well acquainted, "no. We do not care to stab frogs. What we want is . . . very simply . . . a meal."

The proprietor was affronted. He took back his harpoons, switched off his flashlights. "Look," he said, "you don't seem to understand. Stabbing them's the whole idea. That's what makes this place so unique. What do you think has made me known for five hundred miles north and five hundred miles south? That," he said and pointed to the sign which the Pismires had missed when they turned in. " 'You Hook 'Em —I Cook 'em.' That's what brings the crowds."

George Pismire looked about the empty building. He listened to the gentle drip of water, the plaintive croaking.

With his customary insight, he went to the heart of the matter. "Where," he asked bluntly, "are your crowds?"

The proprietor of the "You Hook 'Em—I Cook 'Em," suddenly deflated. He peered about uneasily. "I don't know," he said, "I just don't know. This was planned," he informed the Pismires. "It's got a psychological viewpoint. I got myself a consultant out from the Los Angeles Bureau of Psychiatric Planners for Culinary Projects. A man has three basic instincts," he explained. "Eat, hunt and love. 'You Hook 'Em—I Cook 'em' takes care of the first two. That's about as much as you can expect from any one joint—though there's some dark nooks here that don't do so bad for number three. Eat and hunt. It's nothing dangerous. I admit you can't exactly stalk a frog and a frog ain't going to bite back. Still it's hunting and it takes skill. We keep a list of the longest pair of legs landed each evening by a hooker." He indicated the list which was itself very short. "Still the people don't come. Why?" he asked George Pismire anxiously. "Why?"

George Pismire shook his head. Even to him the answer, though near, had not yet come.

"It's scientific," the proprietor insisted. "The Los Angeles Bureau P.P.C.P. gave me a nine plus rating on their Chase-Chew graph. That puts me in the upper sextile with a capacity crowd guaranteed on every night but Monday. I can't miss," he said, "with a rating like that."

For a minute the frogs' legs proprietor seemed genuinely cheered by this contemplation of his Chase-Chew rating. "They guaranteed it. It's scientific," he said belligerently.

Then he recalled himself. He gazed about his bosky building. His eyes took stock of its science-refuting emptiness.

"It's scientific," he said, "but where are they? What's wrong?"

George Pismire did not that evening, know, but softly, slowly inside himself the star-like points of the Pismire Plan were beginning to twitch a little; like a five months' child the Pismire Plan was stirring.

"The people are hard up," he said, echoing Ada's earlier answer, though he himself knew that was not the whole answer to the "You Hook 'Em —I Cook 'Em" problem.

There's more to it than that," the proprietor urged, but George

Pismire, his hunger and weariness increasing, drove off leaving the troubled restaurateur, harpoons in one hand, flashlights in the other, unanswered among the mists rising from off his frog-inhabited waters.

"I'm getting pretty hungry," George said as they drove onward. "How about you Ada?"

"I could certainly eat," Ada admitted.

They came next to a trout farm. "The Dolly Varden Rainbow Trout Farm."

"There's no such thing as a Dolly Varden Rainbow Trout," George Pismire complained, but he was hungry enough now to eat even a misnomer without wincing, and would have driven gladly under the Dolly Varden pavilion, gracefully illuminated as it was with festoons of electric-light globes painted to represent fish eyes, and have cast his line into the pretty Dolly Varden lagoon.

But Ada would not. She utterly refused. "You can't tell how long it might take you, George, to catch anything. You never were a very lucky fisherman and I'm getting really faint with hunger. Besides," she said, "it would just look too silly . . . the two of us sitting out there alone under a flood light trying to catch a fish for our supper. Like two simple Simons," she said with unexpected tartness.

George was considerably surprised at Ada's outburst, mild though it was, for she was usually as even-tempered as the day was long. This day he was willing to admit, however, had been unusually long and it was his own nerves, frayed by hunger, which made him refuse to stop at either of the next two places even though they advertised food.

"I've heard lion cub steaks are very good," Ada said hungrily reading the sign of the Hobart Lion Farm, which announced, "Juicy Cub Steaks with Jungle Juice Cocktails."

"No," George declared flatly. "No. I'm not going to chase any lion around with spear and flashlight. I'll go to bed hungry, first."

"Oh do be reasonable, George," urged Ada, whose stomach was growling unpleasantly, "no one's going to expect you to chase a lion." But George Pismire, who could be on occasion as stubborn as any less gifted man, refused to pause even long enough to determine the method by which the cub steaks might be procured. And he paused scarcely longer at the Reptile Ranch, whose specialty was, "Tasty Rattlesnake Tenderloins," and which gave a free rattle to every party of diners.

"No," he said truculently, "not even if they catch, kill and cook them themselves, leaving us nothing to do but the eating."

"I expect they have a very high Chase-Chew rating," Ada said wistfully, noting their empty premises as they sped by.

"I can't eat a graph," George said shortly, after which the Pismires were silent for some time.

It was a memory of Ada's which caused George to stop at "The Little Country Store," a vast, blazing red and white checked drive-in market.

"Don't you remember, George," Ada asked, "how good crackers and cheese tasted in the old days when we took drives out into the country? I think they would be just the thing now! We could eat them while we hunted a place to spend the night."

George, himself remembering the pleasant combination of flavors afforded by mellow-cheese and crisp salty crackers, drove without protest into the vacant parking lot in front of The Little Country Store. Reminiscently he made his way toward the grocery department which lay at the rear of the store beyond the liquor, drug, rubber goods and magazine departments.

"Cheese and crackers," he said with brisk cheerfulness, already anticipating the appeasement of his hunger.

"Cheese and crackers?" echoed the clerk, a young woman wearing a red and white gingham dress and who had a sunbonnet hanging down her back and white ruffled pantalets ascending her legs.

George Pismire resented her parrot-like tones. "Yes, cheese and crackers," he repeated enunciating very clearly.

"What for?" the young woman asked.

"What for?" George Pismire had not supposed cheese and crackers could serve any other purpose than that of eating. "Why to eat," he said with such patience as he was able to command.

"At once?" the young lady asked. "Without cooking?"

"Cooking? I never heard of cooking cheese and crackers."

The young lady looked at George as if this were nothing to be proud of. Swinging her sunbonnet and rustling her pantalets she said, "Cheese and crackers serve as the basis of any number of delightful cooked culinary treats. But if you want cheese and crackers to eat at once—out of hand—so to speak, what you really want is a Cheeso Pre-Fab Sand."

"A what?" George Pismire asked.

"A Cheeso Preb-Fab Sand."

"I never heard of such a thing," George said, his hope of quickly getting something to eat beginning to fade.

"Where have you been recently?" the young woman asked, eyeing George suspiciously.

"I've been driving West from New York."

The young woman appeared relieved by this news. "Then you haven't been hearing the Cheeso Pre-Fab Sand Programs, have you?"

"No," George said, "I certainly have not."

Without any preliminary warning the young woman, to George Pismire's profound astonishment, suddenly lifted her red and white checked skirts revealing enormous lengths of white pantelets (which like inverse pagodas grew wider as they went higher). Then, swaying these two temple-like structures in a movement which suggested some extensive seismographic disturbance, she bagan to sing:

With a Pre-Fab Sand
In each little hand
If the Pre-Fab Sand is Cheeso,
You'll feel just grand
You'll soon understand
Why Pre-Fab Sands always please so.

As abruptly as they had been lifted the skirts were dropped, the pagodas became stationary and the young lady ceased her singing.

"You never heard that?" she asked incredulously.

Bewildered by the suddenness of this assault in salesmanship George Pismire said no. "No," he said, his throat feeling a little dry, "no, never."

"Which will it be?" the young lady asked.

George Pismire felt a good deal of uncertainty as to what he was being asked and answered quickly, "Just let me have two Pre-Fab Cheeso Sands, please."

Using these extraordinary words George had the uneasy feeling that he might be speaking pidgin English to some native on a distant atoll. He had not the slightest idea what he was ordering, but so strong now was his desire to get something passably edible into even one of his hands and return with it to the car—where, Ada, quite understandably, was beginning to toot the horn—that he repeated the strange words, "Just two Pre-Fab Cheeso Sands, please."

"But which?" the young woman persisted. "After all I'm not a mind reader. A.G.G., or a J.J.?"

Out of some unthinking strata of human curiosity and non-intelligence

George Pismire answered, though the minute he had done so he regretted it.

"A.G.G. or a J.J.?" he asked.

The young woman's suspicious look returned. "A Gertrude the Guernsey or a Julia the Jersey?" she replied, shortly.

George was betrayed now by some blankness in his eyes for, more experienced, he had wisely held his tongue.

"You don't mean you've never heard of *them*?"

George Pismire still remained silent.

"When they were both at the United Nations' Expositions and two hundred and seventy-five thousand people a day saw them? Look," she said and pointed to two large gilt-framed pictures which hung above the Quick-Freeze unit. "Julia always wears daisies. She's a more simple, unsophisticated type than Gertrude. Gertrude's my favorite, though. Nothing but orchids for *her*. Julia's husband is Barney the Bull and Gertrude's is Oscar the Ox. Gertrude's just had a calf."

As George Pismire received the information, "Gertrude the Guernsey's just had a calf," there issued from his mouth utterly without volition of his own, the words, "A calf called Alf."

As this extraordinary phrase left his mouth George Pismire had the sudden sickening conviction that his entire life had been spent just here and in repeating just such nonsense syllables, and that what he had formerly considered his true, his veritable life was no more than a little between-syllables reverie with which he had momentarily refreshed himself. This was what was real: he was *actually* marooned on some distant atoll, some outpost of civilization where the inhabitants had reverted to animal worship and where once again garlands were hung about the necks of bulls and where before the sacred cows the propitiating words were spoken: "And the calf was named Alf."

The night was warm, the store empty; outside, the toots which Ada played upon the horn were becoming infrequent and somehow more distant, too. George Pismire felt sweat break out upon his upper lip and in the creases of his eyelids. It seemed to him that the pantalets were beginning to sway again, but in his confused state he couldn't be sure about this, and he did not care, in any case to confirm his suspicions by a closer inspection.

"Why you were just fooling, weren't you?" asked the young woman with pleasure. "You knew all the time, didn't you? 'Alf the calf!' Why that's cute as can be!"

Then, unmistakably, the pantalets did begin once more to weave, the reverse pagodas appeared again in all their unstable height, and the young lady, once more, sang.

When a Jersey makes a Pre-Fab
She makes it mild and sweet:
But when our Julia makes a Pre-Fab
She makes a Super-Jersey-Cheeso-Treat.

When a Guernsey makes a Pre-Fab
She makes it sharp and snappy:
But when our Gertie makes a Pre-Fab
She makes you Super-Guernsey-Cheeso-Happy.

George Pismire had taken advantage of one of those moments in which the young woman sang with her eyes shut (overcome perhaps by emotion) surreptitiously to snatch a small turnip from a nearby vegetable bin. A few bites of its strong, but not unpalatable, fibre somewhat stayed his hunger and almost completely cleared his head. By the time the song was finished and the young lady had put a Mild Jersey Cheeso Pre-Fab Sand in one of his hands and a Snappy Guernsey Cheeso Pre-Fab Sand in the other, he was able to speak with very nearly his customary vigor.

"Why," he asked, without any ameliorating preliminaries, "did you do that?" He had more sense than to ask the young woman why she sold Pre-Fab Sands at all. That clearly was beyond her control; but why she sold them in the manner she did, about that he was intensely curious.

"Do what?" she asked, busy making change.

Neither "sing" nor "dance" seemed very apt words with which to describe what had just occurred, and George Pismire, who liked accuracy, thought of others, but decided that "sing" and "dance," inaccurate as they were, were more suitable.

"Sing and dance," he said.

The young lady tossed her sunbonnet pridefully. "I am a graduate of the College of Southern California Customer Approach Course," she explained. "In the C.S.C.—C.A.C. we learn songs like that about all our products. I have a repertoire of over fifty Customer Chants," she said, and paused, George Pismire was afraid, meaningfully. Nervously, he hurried her on by mentioning the dances.

"Those were Salesmanship Surges," she explained laughingly, amused by his naïve unprofessional phraseology. "At C.S.C. all Surges are correlated with degrees of customer resistance and we use whichever is most suited to the type of resistance we meet. It's all very scientific," she explained. "No use wasting a high-frequency Surge on a customer with a low-frequency type of resistance."

George Pismire, who flattered himself that his resistance to a Cheeso Pre-Fab Sand was as high as that of any man's in the world, asked with some complacency, "I suppose that what I just witnessed was a very high-frequency . . . Surge?"

"Oh dear, no," said the young woman frankly, "you were quite an easy touch, very low-frequency, if I may say so."

George Pismire now deliberately turned his back on the Pre-Fab Saleslady and took another reviving bite from his turnip. Thus fortified he turned about and inquired with great earnestness, "But my dear young lady, where is all of this getting you? Consider please, your store is empty. There must be thousands of unsold Pre-Fabs in that refrigerator. Does it not seem . . ." but George Pismire broke off; another tentacle of the Pismire Plan had disengaged itself, and bemused by his consideration of it, George ceased to speak.

The young woman, supposing he had finished, repeated a sentence which had obviously formed part of her C.S.C. Customer Approach Course, "Mass Sales Resistance is not overcome in a day, nor does a single drop of water wear down a large stone."

Then, as she launched into a farewell Customer Chant and correlated Surge, George Pismire hurriedly made his way out of The Little Country Store and to the car where Ada, crouching uncomfortably against the door, was sleeping. George awakened her solicitously.

"What was going on in there, George?" she asked dazedly. "It looked awfully strange from here."

"It looked strange in there, too," George admitted. "It was a Customer Chant and Salesmanship Surge," he explained and slipped into Ada's hand one of the Pre-Fabs, whether the Mild Jersey or the Snappy Guernsey, he couldn't be sure.

Ada gave a little gasp. The Pre-Fabs *were* rather cold, slick, unpleasant objects to handle.

"What in the world is this, George?"

"It's either a Julia the Jersey or a Gertrude the Guernsey Super-Cheeso Pre-Fab Sand," George said grimly.

Ada, not yet completely awake, gasped again. "George," she said, "what in the world happened to you in there? You sound so queer, you worry me."

George Pismire had been worried himself because for a split second, as he had repeated this chant-like statement, it had seemed to him that he was about to launch into an involuntary but completely correlated Salesmanship Surge; however, quickly controlling himself he stepped on the self-starter and got the car out onto the highway. Now, with the fresh night air flowing across his face he felt quite restored and said reassuringly, "I'm all right, Ada."

Ada, still gingerly holding her untasted Pre-Fab, said, "I thought you were going to get us some good cheese and crackers, George."

"Well, I tried to," George admitted gloomily, "but they wouldn't sell me any. Go on, dear," he urged, "eat it. You need nourishment and it can't possibly hurt you. It's just a kind of emulsion of cheese and crackers as I understand it. Homogenized and semi-dehydrated."

He himself had not yet bitten in to his own Pre-Fab, and he watched with some concern as Ada took her first bite.

"How is it, dear?" he asked.

Ada answered temperately, "It seems to foam a little as I chew it. Otherwise it's not too bad."

George Pismire put his own Pre-Fab down on the seat between himself and Ada and quietly finished his turnip, which, while far from his idea of a sustaining, much less an appetizing evening meal, was at least quite foamless.

The Pismires spent that night at the first Autel they came to after leaving The Country Store, an unpretentious little Tudor Village whose separate units were small but pleasant half-timbered buildings. The one to which the manager led the Pismires was called The Anne Hathaway.

"Would you any rather have the Shakespeare or Queen Elizabeth?" the manager asked affably.

The Pismires were very weary and the Anne Hathaway seemed as good a spot as any other to spend the night; a better in fact, since it was nearer than any other.

"No, no," George Pismire said. "This will serve admirably."

"You're the only guests I have tonight," their host insisted, "and if you'd be a bit more comfortable in the Sir Francis Drake or the Anne Boleyn why feel perfectly free to speak right up. Anne Boleyn has a wood burning fireplace and an automatic thermador."

By a little firmness they were able to convince their host that they wanted nothing better than what they had, and presently he bade them good night and George and Ada were free to step over the threshold of the Anne Hathaway and close the door behind them. George put down their two bags, took his still uneaten Pre-Fab from his pocket (it proved to be the Snappy Guernsey) laid it on the night stand and turned about to inspect their room.

"Looks pretty cozy doesn't it, Ada?" he asked.

Ada, who had gone at once to the bathroom to gargle, for her Pre-Fab continued to foam slightly even after swallowing, called out over the noise of the running tap, "I can't hear a word you say, George."

George never repeated what he had said, however, for he was reading with mounting anger the small cards (each carrying the same information) attached to various articles in the room: "The management will gladly permit the retention of this" (radio, phonograph, thermador, icebox, vacuum bottle, electric fan, electric heater, electric blanket, pneumopad, whatever the article was) "for the payment of a nominal sum. If you do not wish to use this" (name of article) "kindly inform the management and it will be gladly removed."

When Ada came out of the bathroom, a slight fleck of foam still on her upper lip, George was informing the management by phone and not kindly, that the articles (and he named them) could be removed at once. When this had been done there was very little left in the Anne Hathaway but the bed, the plumbing, the Pismires and a Gideon Bible. The Gideon Bible had been given a chintz cover bearing the words "Ye Olde Gideon Bible," so that the room was thus not entirely bereft of its Tudor atmosphere; and the bed, even without its electric blanket and pneumo-pad felt very refreshing indeed to the Pismires after their long and wearisome day.

Outside, the crickets chirped dreamily. Far back in the hills a coyote barked thrice as if in warning. The night wind carried the scent of the orange blossoms and the salt tang of the not distant sea through the mullioned windows. Overhead the large California stars shone peacefully down upon the Tudor Village Autel, the Anne Hathaway and the George Pismires composing their tired limbs for sleep.

For the second time that day George asked, now very drowsily, "Glad to be getting home, Ada?"

"Yes," said Ada, "though it's changed since I was a girl with so many. . . ." What Ada had intended saying was, "with so many easterners here," but this, considering that George was himself an easterner, seemed unkind and she said instead, "with so many out-of-staters here."

Her kindness was lost on George, however, who was asleep the minute he had asked his question and who would, except for one untoward incident, have slept the night through without rousing. Shortly after midnight, being smitten by pangs of hunger, for a turnip while momentarily filling has no staying powers, he, not wholly aware of what he did, thrust out his hand and took the Snappy Pre-Fab from the night stand where he had unthinkingly left it, and in a few minutes ate the whole of it. Unaccustomed as he was, either to eating at that hour of the night, or to eating Pre-Fabs at any hour whatever, he spent the rest of the night in a kind of uneasy trance.

This was most uncomfortable for him and for Ada, too, since George in the beginning of his dreaming imagined himself to be a bullfrog pursued by some very scientific hookers and tossed and croaked upon the Anne Hathaway pull-out in an agony of stertorous apprehension. Later, he thought that he had been lured, somehow, inside "The Big Mouth," and only Ada's voice saved him from experiencing in his dreams the horrors of mastication and subsequent ingestion.

"George, George," Ada's voice insisted until finally George, opening his eyes, discovered that the Anne Hathaway was filled with the dry, fine-grained sunlight of a California morning.

"Ada," he asked thickly, "Ada? Is there anything wrong?"

"Wrong," said Ada who had awakened with heartburn and was feeling irritable. "Don't ask me if there's anything wrong! I'm not the one who was making the disturbance."

"Disburbance," George echoed.

"Muttering and tossing," Ada told him.

George opened and closed his mouth a few times and moved his tongue about as if some memory of the words he had just said might still lurk in them.

"What did I say?" he asked Ada, unable to find in mouth or tongue any other memories than those of Pre-Fab.

"I couldn't quite catch it," Ada admitted. "It sounded to me as if it might be some more of that store nonsense you were repeating last night."

While George remained in bed, exploring mind and mouth for memories of the night, Ada bathed and dressed. Standing before the mirror arranging her hair she said to George, "It'll be wonderful to be home again, won't it? If you get right up George, we should be there easily by lunch time."

Ordinarily George Pismire was eager to return to his three-thousand acre ranch—La Pismirada—a kingdom in itself. But this morning he was content to lie abed thinking of it: the variety of soils and climates it encompassed; its irrigated acreage where blue-green alfalfa flourished the year around; the truck gardens whose produce brought top prices in the Los Angeles markets; the peach and apricot orchards with their long green alleyways and bumper crops. He saw, in his mind's eye, barley rippling across La Pismirada's hill lands, deepening from spring's yellow-green to harvest's dusty gold. He saw the herds of white-faced Herefords, the Poland-China hogs, the Palominos, colored like the tawny hills across which they ranged. Still, remembering these things which ordinarily meant so much to him, he dallied and equivocated.

"I think it would be just as well to take it slowly today, Ada," he said. "Have a look around. Things have been changing since we were here . . . and are bound to change more. I think we might just spend the day sight-seeing."

Slowly, thoughtfully, George Pismire swung out of bed resting his feet on the spot where the Iceland Kid rug had been. "What do you say, Ada?" he asked.

Afterwards, George Pismire was wont to liken his day's journey between La Pismirada and the Tudor Village Autel to a similar day's journey along the road to Damascus. But that morning Ada, without benefit of hindsight, could only feel great surprise at his proposal. It was a proposal which delighted her—she herself was very fond of a loitering, gypsy day—but that George, usually so brisk and businesslike, should make it, gave her some concern. She attributed it to his digestive upset, unaware that what she was witnessing was not indigestion but the preliminary labor-pains occasioned by the impending birth of The Pismire Plan.

Both Pismires, after their unhappy experience in trying to find a suitable eating place the evening before (and since both were now suffering from slight gastric disturbances), readily agreed to breakfast at the first place they found which served food. It might very well prove, they believed, as good as any they would locate after long search; and if it were not, it would still have the great merit of offering food at once; a merit not to be sneezed at, considering the empty and inflamed state of their stomachs.

In spite of their digestive difficulties the Pismires enjoyed their drive through the placid September morning. The air had that milky moonstone haze characteristic of early fall mornings in the vicinity of Los Angeles; buzzards floated lazily above the occasional clumps of eucalypti; towering growths of fuschia and hibiscus alternated with equally luxuriant stands of cosmos, asters, chrysanthemums: blossoms brought to California by homesick easterners.

After the brilliant effusion of the flowers, the gentle curves and quiet colors of the foothills were restful to their eyes. And above the foothills, the great, blue, shimmering mountains rose with their eternal reminder to George Pismire of that height and bulk to which even his Eartheaters had not yet aspired. Except for the fact of their tremulous stomachs—and for the same dispirited, staring crowds which they had seen on the day before—there was nothing in the morning's ride which did not please them. And they were pleased, too, that the first eating place they came to was a Nubian Goat Ranch advertising, "Milk Warm From the Udder."

"Turn in, George," Ada said. "I've always heard that goat milk was very soothing to the stomach, and I learned to milk when a girl."

George turned in and, though ordinarily the last man in the world to descend to the triviality of the pun, so great was his feeling of exhilarated expectancy (standing as he was on the brink of The Pismire Plan) that he there made a pun which Ada never forgot. "Ada," he said, as they alighted from their car, "no matter which goat they ask you to milk, say to them, I wish to milk the udder."

Embarrassed, as every one is when a great man is jocose, Ada pretended that she had not heard George's foolish words and walked briskly ahead of him to greet the owner of the Nubian Goat Ranch.

This man was somehow familiar to her, though certainly no one dressed as he was could put her in mind of any known relative or friend. Then as she was bidding him good morning Ada quite suddenly realized who it was he resembled; he was the living embodiment of every picture she had ever seen of Robinson Crusoe. True, he did not carry an umbrella, nor did he, being barefooted, wear the peculiar hand-sewn, peak-toed shoes of Crusoe. Otherwise, however, he was the castaway, in spite of the fact that instead of a desert island he had only his quarter-acre ranch fronting on the busy Foothill Boulevard. Like Crusoe's, his goatskin garment was short and sleeveless; like Crusoe's, his beard and hair spilled in manly plentitude over his well-muscled shoulders and chest. But Ada had seen far too many barefoot, or sandaled, bearded or clean shaven, robed or disrobed prophets, swamis, hermits, vegetarians, seers, and plain cranks and health addicts in her girlhood days in the vicinity of Los Angeles to be in the least taken aback by the Nubian Goat Raiser clad only in a goatskin.

"Good morning," she said cheerfully, "we would like to buy a quart of goat milk for our breakfast. I can milk," she assured the young man.

The Nubian Goat Raiser seemed startled by her request. "The truth of the matter is," he explained, "that it's been quite some time since anyone stopped in here, and while the original angle was for the customer to milk his own, the uncertainty of customer response was hard on the goats and I've got in to the habit of milking them myself. I'll admit it isn't playing just fair with the S.C.C.—C.A.C., but it's sure a darned sight easier on the goats. I grant you, that this way the place loses all of its uniqueness—no special sales angle, no customer participation, not a single talking point to sell you on."

Ada immediately reassured him. "You don't need to worry for a minute about us," she said. "We're already sold, as you call it, on the idea of buying a quart of goat milk here."

"That's mighty kind of you, lady," the Goat Raiser said, brightening perceptibly.

"Oh pshaw," exclaimed Ada, "it's not a kindness at all. As a matter of fact," she told him with that confidential garrulity which on occasion annoyed George, "I seriously doubt that either my husband or myself could tolerate anything on our stomachs less gentle than goat milk this morning."

"Is that so?" asked the Nubian Goat Raiser politely.

"Yes," Ada declared, "it is indeed." Then she went on to explain. "We each ate a Cheeso Preb-Fab last night."

"Lady, you don't need to say another word," the Goat Raiser exclaimed sympathetically. "Those Pre-Fabs are pure poison and I'm not kidding. Why, once a customer stopping in here for the very same reason you are now, thoughtlessly handed the remainder of a Pre-Fab to one of my goats. Mind you, I'm not blaming him," he said with magnanimity. "We get all this bad publicity." (The Goat Raiser seemed now to identify himself with the animals he raised.) "How we can eat tin cans and old underwear and inner tubes and never take any harm from it. So this customer never thought twice about what he was doing when he handed out that Pre-Fab, I'm confident. Nevertheless, two hours later one of the sweetest, most productive little nannys I ever owned, little Los Angeles Nubian Rose passed on. She was a two-quarter, day in and day out," he said reminiscently, "excepting of course just before freshening."

Before Ada, who had been genuinely touched by this recital, could say a sympathetic word, George Pismire, who though not without a certain amount of feeling for the man's personal and financial loss had nevertheless not forgotten his own harassed stomach, said shortly, "A great pity to be sure. Now if you can just provide us with a quart of warm milk we'll be greatly obliged to you."

"Well, as I was explaining," the Goat Raiser said, "it won't be warm. Customer-response being what it is, I milk early every morning myself. But I've got God's plenty of AAAA or better, registered Nubian goat milk on hand. All you need do is step next door to the pottery works and buy yourselves a couple of mugs to drink from, and I'll be ready to fill 'em up for you as fast as you can drink 'em down."

This further delay in getting food began to corrode the surface of George Pismire's early mood of gaiety and he said with some irritability, "I must say this seems a very funny arrangement for doing business."

The Nubian Goat Raiser gave a short laugh. "Wait till you catch sight of what they've got next door in the way of a business," he advised, "and you'll see that without some such arrangement there wouldn't be any business over there at all."

George Pismire's ever present interest in commercial organization, on however small and pathetic a scale, caused him to ask now, "Just what *is* the arrangement to which you refer?"

"I don't ever sell milk without selling at the same time a container from the Perfecto-Pottery Works." The Goat Raiser jerked his thumb toward the Perfecto-Pottery Works and their owner who had, George now realized, been hovering hopefully among his wares since he and Ada had first alighted at the Goat Ranch. "And he," the Goat Raiser continued, "don't ever sell a container without it's being filled with goat milk. It's what you call a tie-up. We get 'em coming and going. Not," he added with disarming frankness, "that there's been much of either lately. Particularly, over there. As a matter of fact," he said, lowering his voice, "the Perfecto-Pottery Works stinks."

No sooner had the Nubian Goat Raiser spoken these unfriendly words than he became remorseful. "Well, I sure am a hell of a credit to the S.C.C.—C.A.C.!" he exclaimed. "They warned me about breaking loose from the Customer Chants, but I guess I'm just too much of an individualist for my own good. Besides, times have been so hard a man gets so he don't care what he says. Seeing a customer is so unusual you just kind of lose control. Now you go right on over there," he said nodding toward the Perfecto-Pottery Works, "and get yourselves a couple of mugs and I'll set out the milk. I tell you what I'll do for you folks. I'll give you milk from Pomona Lassie. She's the best little nanny on the ranch since the passing of Los Angeles Nubian Rose."

For a second Ada was afraid George was going to say, "I want milk from the udder," but without a further word he accompanied her next door to the Perfecto-Pottery Works.

The Pismires had noticed many outdoor pottery displays in their journey the day before, but a pottery display seen at a distance of one hundred feet and from a vehicle traveling at fifty miles an hour is quite a different matter from a pottery display seen from contact level and at the pace of a slow walk, the slow walk constantly interrupted by the presence of the pottery dealer himself. The difference, George Pismire thought, dreams still on his mind, was comparable to that between the nightmare a friend recounts to you, and the nightmare you suffer through yourself.

"We want two mugs," he said to the Perfecto-Pottery dealer, a suntanned young man in a smock.

"I'll lead you to the mug bay," said the young man, "but may I call your attention, in passing, to some of the objects I have which are suitable for decorating your lawn, terrace, patio, pool, grill, outdoor living room, sunken garden or rumpus room? Any unornamented outdoor space, or indoor for that matter. How about one of these mermaids? A charming adjunct to the bathroom or pool. Artistic, glazed, vari-colored, impervious to water." He turned suddenly upon Ada. "Have you ever found bathing a lonely experience?" he asked.

Ada was so taken aback by this public questioning concerning an experience she had always considered unusually private that she inquired, scarcely realizing what she did, the price of the mermaid. "Seven ninety-eight," the young man said, quickly placing the mermaid in George Pismire's reluctant arms. "Seven ninety-eight and two makes eight and one nine and one more ten."

With the change already in her hand there seemed very little Ada could do save give the young man a ten dollar bill. "She buys it," the young man said waggishly to George, "but I bet I know who appreciates it."

George Pismire looked down at the object he held, and the sight of the creature's flamboyant coloring and exuberant curves made him feel slightly queasy. The Perfecto-Pottery dealer, however, stimulated by this unexpected sale, fluttered among his wares, his smock bellying out like a butterfly's wings. George leaned against one of the posts which supported the palm covered roof of the Perfecto-Pottery Works and abandoned Ada to him. Looking about he saw fauns, satyrs, leprechauns, nymphs, naiades, goblins, elves, brownies, gnomes, trolls, fairies, witches, wizards. All multi-colored and, George supposed, glazed and impervious to water.

Worst of all, he believed, were the objects out of which vegetation grew: the array of animals disemboweled and containing in place of their discarded viscera, parsley, thyme, baby's breath, Persian violets and the like. There were old farmers, obviously "hayseeds," from whose ears grass sprouted; there were innumerable small donkeys inside whose scooped-out bodies various cacti grew, worst of crops, George thought to have to grow interiorly; there were mother kangaroos sheltering within their pouches articles both organic and inorganic; articles so foreign either to kangaroos or pouches, that simply from sympathetic observation George began to feel like a man with an impending attack of gravel. He tried to find some less painful objects upon which to rest his eyes, though there seemed to be none.

There were hundreds (reckoning roughly) of figures both human and inhuman clustered about a small pool, in many postures, but none which did not permit the discharge from the mouth of a stream of water back into the pool. It was no doubt his exacerbated stomach which suggested to George the unhappy comparison of the place to a large and popular vomitorium and he turned away trying to put the idea out of his mind. He was delighted to discover a whale spouting, quite naturally, and he kept his eyes upon this pleasant and refreshing sight until the Perfecto-Potter in a burst of excessive salesmanship flaunted the tail of his smock between himself and the whale.

There were birds in every stage of life from that of the first peep over the edge of the cracked cement shell to a probably final survey of the world from between the closing jaws of a pottery snake.

There were innumerable fancy fungi, with which to "embellish the front lawn"; indeed, enough toadstools or mushrooms (George had never been certain which was which) to carpet the lawn with a fungi forest. And there were any number of small objects designed to be placed under or upon the toadstools; frogs, toads, lizzards, dragonflies, elves, owls and the like. There were even large toadstools designed to be used as tables, and smaller ones to serve as seats.

The reproductions of fairy tale figures George found least upsetting: Peter's wife in a stucco pumpkin shell; the old woman in a cement shoe; Jack clinging to his composition beanstalk; the twenty-four blackbirds thrusting their heads outward from a pottery pie; but even these figures, accustomed as he was to them since youth, became, in the brilliant and increasingly warm morning air, somehow very unpleasantly mixed; the colors of their vari-colored glazes began to run into each other; their strange outlines bulged and wavered.

"Ada," George called peremptorily, "Ada. Let's get those cups and get out of here."

"Very well, dear," Ada answered, "if you'll just help me to decide."

Clutching his mermaid (two feet long and irregularly outlined) with distaste, George made his way to what the Perfecto-Potter had called the mug bay. There, the situation was exactly as he had feared. The Perfecto-Potter had no cups, as such. He had only eviscerated animals with necks, horns, tails, wings, ears, and in the case of the elephants, noses, so contorted as to form handles. Under these circumstances there was no question whatever of choice and George did nothing more than blindly point.

"Those two," he said.

The Perfecto-Potter picked up first a white swan whose hollowed frame formed the container and whose neck, understandingly bowed, served as a handle, and next a monkey with looped tail accommodatingly offering a means of grasping his empty torso.

Not caring to see more cups, George did not wait for Ada to pay for her purchases but returned at once to the Nubian Goat Ranch.

The Nubian Goat Raiser gazed at him in some wonder. "You bought something!" he said, seemingly unable to believe his eyes.

"My wife did," George replied rather ungallantly.

"I guess things must be picking up. That's the first time I've known anyone to buy anything over there since I can remember." The Goat Raiser then looked down at the figure George held and whistled. "Some bust," he said.

George laid the mermaid down upon the table beside the pitcher of Pomona Lassie's milk which awaited Ada's return with the Perfecto-Pottery cups.

"My wife and I are traveling," George explained stiffly, "and we would find it very inconvenient to carry this about with us. I'll be very happy to present it to you."

"Oh no you don't . . ." said the Goat Raiser, picking up the mermaid and thrusting her once again into George's unwilling arms. "There's a tie-up, like I said, between me and the pottery guy, but it don't go near that far. I don't mean any reflection on your taste, but I personally don't think a thing like that looks decent. For all I know that's maybe the way a mermaid's stacked but I'm trying to build up a family trade here and an object like that just don't fit in the picture."

George Pismire, being who he was, knew that he was never at any time safe from the glare of publicity. And since he had no desire for his visit to California to be announced in the press by pictures of himself, holding that particular piece of Perfecto-Pottery ware, with an accompanying paragraph explaining that he had been wrangling with a half-clad Nubian Goat Raiser over the propriety of a totally unclad mermaid, he, without another word, walked to the car and laid the mermaid face down upon the back seat.

Pomona Lassie's milk was all that her owner had claimed it to be and after three cups each the Pismires felt much refreshed. The Nubian Goat Raiser refusing also the offer of the cups, these, too, were placed on the back seat of the car, and the Pismires resumed their journey.

"We'll have to get rid of that thing," George said with a backward movement of his head in the direction of the mermaid.

"We can't very well just toss her out," Ada said. "That would look too queer."

"Nothing," said George morosely, having felt the Goat Raiser's words about taste and propriety more keenly than he cared to admit, "nothing can very well look queerer than traveling about the countryside with an object like that reclining on the back seat."

For George Pismire, like many another captain of industry, was exceedingly conservative and had a strong belief in the supernatural. He had been a very poor boy and the transition from poverty to fabulous riches had served to teach him, as a burning bush or plague of locusts had reminded earlier men, that there was considerably more abroad in the world than human reason or any sequence of events human reason could logically predict.

It was this conservative streak in George which prompted his next remark. After passing a number of billboards advertising beer, breakfast food and the like, he turned to Ada. "That's a mistake," he said lifting his hand toward the approaching advertisement of a motor oil. "They were more effective when attached."

Ada was genuinely shocked by this old-fashioned opinion from George who, in all that had to do with selling and advertising, was usually so advanced.

"Why, George," she reminded him, "you've used them unattached yourself all this past year in advertising your Eartheaters."

"Don't say *I've* used them," George corrected her, a little testily. "Say the advertising department has used them."

"Anyway," Ada insisted, "they'd look absolutely dated now any other way. Why I can't remember seeing them used unattached for years in any advertisement of consequence."

"I'm not talking about what you have or haven't seen," George insisted stubbornly. "I'm talking about effective advertising. Actually, what's been gained by the change?" Without giving Ada any chance to reply he swept on. "When I first started business we made it a practice in all our advertising to keep a woman's bosom attached to a woman. And when we were doing that we really sold merchandise! Oh I know," he said hurriedly, thinking Ada might break in with some of her modern art theories, picked up at the lectures she occasionally attended, "it wasn't abstract, it tended toward story telling, maybe it wasn't even art. But it sold merchandise! And with the female bosom attached and covered the public knew what was being advertised. A night gown, or negligee over the bosom meant toothpaste, soap, bed linen and the like."

Ada was not in the least strong-minded, but when she knew a fact she knew it. "That just isn't so," she objected. "Women in night gowns or negligees usually advertised silverware, coffee or vacuum cleaners."

"I mean generally speaking," George said, who hated the habit women have of spoiling the outlines of a large general concept by some niggling objection. "Generally speaking, you could tell. The female bosom covered by a bathing suit meant that bathing suits, beach equipment. . . ."

"Oh no, George," Ada interrupted again. "In a bathing suit, it was cigarettes, mostly, as I remember, that the female bosom was advertising."

"Ah," George exclaimed triumphantly, "but you do remember! That's the point. Attached, you remember, even after four or five years. But who's going to remember that?" he asked pointing to a billboard advertising ketchup. "How anyone could tell from that picture what was being advertised I'm sure I don't know! Unattached, they all look exactly alike, mere commercial symbols. . . ."

George stopped the car so suddenly that Ada had no chance to say that she thought this had been the case even before the vogue for unattachment had set in.

"Just the place!" George declared enthusiastically getting out of the car. Ada, who had been caught up in the discussion had not seen that they had come to a riverbed, dry now, of course, in September. George quickly took the Perfecto-Pottery mermaid from the back seat and in one of those intervals in which no cars were passing walked onto the bridge ahead and dropped her over the railing. The sand below the bridge was soft and smooth and the mermaid landed undamaged, face up and with at least three months to wait before she could possibly hope to be waterborne.

"That's going to startle people, George," Ada said, leaning out of the car so that she had a good view of the mermaid, apparently sunbathing on the sands below.

"Let it," said George getting into the car. "Let it."

"Aren't you going to throw the cups away too?" Ada asked.

"No, certainly not," said George shortly. "We might need them again and I for one don't care to walk through another pottery display in order to find something to drink from."

Ada was well enough acquainted with her husband to know that any brusqueness in him was an indication of preoccupation with something beneath the surface of events; and while she, even less than George, had any idea at this time as to how near the surface The Pismire Plan really was, still her woman's intuition bade her be silent. Afterwards, George himself came to consider his next words, obvious and ordinary as they sounded at the time, as the first expression, verbally, of the initial premise of The Pismire Plan. The Pismires had driven in silence for a considerable distance, George still scanning the billboards critically. Then, suddenly, he turned to Ada.

"The people," George Pismire declared, "are not getting what they want."

While neither George nor Ada at the time gave this statement a passing thought, later, in tracing for those interested, the successive stages of the development of The Pismire Plan, George was wont to say, "There it began. Simple, I grant you, but without that discovery nothing else could have been accomplished."

On one occasion, when addressing a group of young English people sent over by their government for indoctrination under the guidance of George Pismire, himself, George said, anent the simplicity of his revolutionary ideas: "I tell you what. Look at it this way. Your Newton saw the apple fall, but I, George Pismire, saw the worm in Newton's apple."

At another time, and with like insight, he thus characterized himself. "Watt saw that steam could raise a kettle's lid. I saw that steam could raise a blister."

There are some people who feel that there is more than a little smugness and complacency in George Pismire's thus linking himself with men like Watt and Newton. Others are of the opinion that for a man of his accomplishments any other attitude would be egotism in its most unattractive pose: the inverted.

His statement went unremarked, however, on that September morning. It was now ten-thirty by the clock on the instrument panel of the Pismire car and the morning was becoming increasingly warm. Ada took off her coat and George opened the car's ventilator. For some time the two rode on, companionably silent, enjoying the familiar landscape. Its broad outlines were unchanged; the mountains as blue and massive as ever, the orange groves as green and immaculate, the distant shore line as silvery and indistinct. But the details, the indications of how these people, shut in between mountains and sea now lived, had changed considerably since the Pismires' last visit to California.

"George," Ada said, "I didn't remember that there were so many goldfish farms here before."

"There weren't," George replied.

There hadn't been so many rabbits advertised at stud, before, either. Or canine graveyards or commercial wedding chapels. There hadn't been so many pony riding academys, free-fall parachute rigs, fancy dry-cleaning establishments, embalmers, rug shampooers, outdoor motion picture arenas, hair stylists, spot welders, hemstitching emporiums, voice-transcription shops, roller and ice-skating rinks, dreambowls, chromefronted bars, bowling alleys and athletic clubs. There hadn't been so many real estate subdivision offices resembling the Anne Hathaway or churches with revolving Neon signs resembling The Little Country Store.

On the outskirts of a small town they passed a row of plain, flat-topped buildings, one of which bore the sign, "The Latter Rain Church."

"What can that mean, George?" Ada asked.

George, who had himself caught sight of the strange inscription from the tail of his eye, replied moodily, "God knows." The burden of insight which he now carried was growing heavier by the minute.

They passed a large truck bearing a sign which read, "The Mystery Tree."

"George?" asked Ada.

George, baffled, shook his head. There was strangeness in the very air.

They passed a billboard which declared in shades of mauve and violet, "A heavenly breath for the breathless."

"Don't ask *me,*" George said irritably before Ada had so much as opened her mouth.

They passed innumerable establishments where by innumerable means the future was foretold: by cards, crystal balls, ouija boards; by phrenology, numerology, palmistry; by the warm breath on a cold mirror, by the tea leaves in the bottom of a cup, by the whorls on the thumb of the right hand.

Outside these seemingly unfrequented places of business their proprietors stood sunning themselves: be-bangled gypsies, Indians with turbans, middle-aged matrons with bedroom slippers and metal hair-curlers off which the sunlight winked cheerfully.

They passed Health Farms, Physical Culture Ranches and Homes for Rectal Diseases. They passed Sanatoria, Sanataria, and Hydropathies. In the midst of all this opportunity for foretelling the future and safeguarding the present Ada thought the people should have looked happier than they did and less uncertain. But they looked neither. And there were as many people along the roadsides and about, but not in these places of odd business, as there had been the day before: congregations of the aimless, the unemployed, the dully staring.

At eleven-thirty the Pismires were again hungry. Pomona Lassie's milk had succeeded admirably in soothing their stomachs but three cups of goat's milk, however salutary, do not constitute a meal, and what the Pismires now wanted was something substantial, something which would stick to their ribs. They noticed almost at once a plain white building called, "The Doggy Diner." Both George and Ada supposed this to mean either that the Diner served hot dogs, or that the proprietor was using the word "doggy" in its rustic sense of fine or elegant.

"How does this strike you, Ada?" George asked.

"I think it looks very nice," Ada replied.

There were, surprisingly enough, a number of cars parked about The Doggy Diner, and this too pleased Ada for she was not fond of solitary dining.

"Let's stop, George," she said enthusiastically. "This really does look very nice."

After some straightening and brushing George and Ada proceeded with cheerful hopefulness toward The Doggy Diner. Once inside its doors the most extraordinary sight they had yet seen met their eyes. The dining room was all they had hoped it would be, clean, restful, pleasant. And it was filled, as Ada liked to see a dining room, with cheerful and enthusiastic diners eating what appeared to be good, well-cooked food. The sole drawback, insofar as the Pismires were concerned, was that all the diners were dogs.

George and Ada gazed at the sight with undisguised amazement. The dogs were obviously accustomed to eating in The Doggy Diner, for all ate with unusual decorum. Each dog had a cubicle suited to his size and there in privacy ate from a white enameled tray. The menu for the day was, obviously, a Salisbury steak, well browned and with considerable pan gravy, creamed spinach and escalloped tomatoes. Looking at and smelling this appetizing food, the first she had seen in two days, Ada feared for a minute that the tears which had come into her eyes would spill over onto her cheeks, but she was able after a little to control her emotion. When her eyes cleared she saw that a few dogs, those on diets, she supposed, or with allergies of one kind and another, were eating all-vegetable or all-meat meals; but for the most part the Salisbury steak, tomato, spinach combination was the rule.

The Pismires were surprised to see none of the dogs' owners about. The dogs' needs were being taken care of by an efficient staff of waiters, sensible looking men in white uniforms with the words, "Doggy Diner," embroidered in red silk over the breast pockets of their jackets. The atmosphere of the Diner, due in part to the obvious pleasure the staff took in the serving of good food, in part to the enthusiasm of the diners, was so appealing to the Pismires that they continued to stand in the doorway for some time after they had discovered that the dining room was not for them. They sniffed the delicious odors of the food, they admired the restful decorations, they wished with all their hearts that there might be some way by which they could obtain a tray filled with the The Doggy Diner dinner.

Just as they had, reluctantly, decided to leave, the proprietor, who until that minute had been busy supervising the serving of a special meal to two magnificent Dalmatians, crossed the room and greeted them courteously.

"This," George told him, after they had talked a little, "is one of the most pleasant eating places I've yet seen in California. So simple," George said, "so refreshing! So conducive to pleasant thoughts and good digestion."

The proprietor replied modestly, "We have no choice as to quiet and simplicity here. A dog, you know, has a very sensitive nervous system. A dining room lined with mirrors for instance, with loud music, and portable tables bursting occasionally into flames—such a room would drive a dog insane after a very few meals."

The proprietor, seeing George smile a little added, without smiling, himself, "I'm not joking, you know. It's been tested. Some dogs crack-up a little sooner, some a little later, but all, under those circumstances crack-up. The Dobermann, for instance, a very high-strung dog, breaks early. A week usually does for a Dobermann. On the other hand we had a little bitch in here last year, an almost human little Pomeranian who had been accustomed to eating wherever her mistress ate, and when we got her, with the exception of a little nighblindness and a slight facial tic, she had seemingly taken no harm from the experience. However," he said with satisfaction, "after a few weeks here she snapped out of even that."

Ada inhaled deeply. "The food smells simply delicious!" she said.

The owner of The Doggy Diner nodded. "It must. A dog, you know, has a very sensitive olfactory sense. Besides we serve nothing but the best foods here. A dog can't stand the starches, the greasy foods, the cold slops a human can take. Fresh vegetables, well hung meats. These are our staples."

After a little further talk Ada was astounded to see George do something he almost never did, that is reveal his identity in order to obtain a favor.

He beckoned The Doggy Diner proprietor in a little closer to him, took out his billfold, showed him a card or two.

"You understand," George said, "I'm in California for a rest and I want no publicity. I wouldn't care for this to get out—but I thought that if you knew that I was a responsible citizen you might see your way clear to arranging for my wife and myself to have a bite to eat here. In the kitchen, perhaps. . . ."

The Doggy Diner owner returned George's cards, and without saying a word indicated by a nod of his head that they were to follow him. He led them through a swinging doorway, down a rather dimly lighted hall through another swinging doorway and into a dining room, the exact duplicate of the one they had just left. The only difference was that here the diners were human beings, not dogs.

"My first love is still the dogs," The Doggy Diner proprietor explained. "But so many owners snitched food from their animals while they were waiting for them to eat that to protect the dogs I set up this dining room for owners here in back. I take just as much care with the food here as in the front dining room," he assured them, "and this way the dogs can eat in peace. You're not an owner, but in view of your fine war record, Mr. Pismire, it will be a pleasure to have you and your wife eat with us."

The proprietor beckoned to one of his waiters and in a few minutes George and Ada were hungrily eating the Salisbury steaks, tomatoes and spinach they had regarded so enviously in the front dining room.

It was here, after a few savory mouthfuls, that George Pismire made the remark which has come to be regarded as the second of the corner stones supporting the completed edifice of The Pismire Plan. Second, that is, in matter of time, for ideologically it is not less important than that first observation of his: "The people are not getting what they want."

"Ada," George said, holding his fork motionless for a moment above his appetizing Doggy Dinner, "the world has come to a sorry pass when dogs fare better than men."

The Pismires left The Doggy Diner in an utterly tranquil mood. The sun of California's glorious midday warmed them, the healthful, satisfying Doggy Dinner filled them. the road to La Pismirada lay inviting and well paved before them. George gave a long contented sigh.

"Ada," he asked, "do you know what I'd like to do now?"

Ada didn't, and even had she known, understanding as she did that anyone who asks such a question wants also to answer it, she would not have answered affirmatively. "No, George," she replied quite truthfully, "I don't know. What would you like to do?"

"Go to a movie," George said.

"Why, George," Ada exclaimed in surprise, "it's been ages since you've gone to a show!"

"That's one of the reasons I'd like to go now."

"Did you have any particular show in mind?"

"No," George said, "nothing in particular."

"What made you think of a show . . . now?" Ada asked.

George found it too difficult to explain; too troublesome to attempt to discover, even for himself, what it was in the light-spangled afternoon which had put him in mind of the pleasure he had had as a youth in leaving the haphazard movement and uncertain weather of the streets for the quiet warmth of the theater and the logical sequence of a movie. The whole of the darkened theater had then seemed to him, tapering funnel-like as it did toward the screen, to have been designed for the quick transportation of the audience to another and more satisfying world. There in the dark, the pipe organ with its floods of music accelerating his progress down that funnel and into that other world, George H. Pismire, the youth, soon identified himself with one of the figures on the screen. He became William S. Hart and triumphed with horse and probity; or Wallace Reid, who could dispense with both and win on charm alone. He had never, when young, walked out of a motion picture theater simply himself, the minimum George H. Pismire. No matter how cold and dusty the autumn streets, how tawdry the shop windows or shopworn the shoppers, it was the Hero who left the movie and walked, unrecognized, past friends and neighbors; in Pismire's chest the hero's passionate heart beat; in Pismire's legs the hero's steel-spring muscles made light the long walk; behind Pismire's eyes the hero's experienced mind appraised the scene.

George smiled, recalling these early movies and his early self. He wanted other fare now than that breakneck vault into the saddle, that irresistible and sidelong glance. Though for kids, he supposed, that muscle-and-saddle dream, that midnight-tryst-and-smoldering-passion view of the world were still most compelling.

What he would like now, George thought, was to sit in a quiet movie house and there see how some man, short or long on biceps and passion, as the case might be, had lived out his term on earth. He would like to see what this man had planned and hoped for and how he had succeeded —or failed. The story could be sad or funny, or neither; about that George didn't care. Only let it concern itself with a man recognizably human and dealing in a human way with his environment and fellowmen. George supposed that there were thousands of such pictures and for an hour and a half he would like to look at such a one and feel himself once again falling down the magic funnel of the theater into someone else's life.

It was difficult for George and Ada to settle upon a picture to see, however. The titles were all very general and all very much alike.

"How about, 'Tomorrow Is Forever?' " George asked.

" 'Yesterday Is All,' might be good," Ada suggested.

They speculated upon the possible subjects of "The Day Will Come," "The Night Is Past," and "Until Tomorrow." George was very taken by a movie called "Past All Remembering," but Ada could see no point either in a picture's recording or their seeing anything so little memorable. They drove by "There'll Always Be Another Day," "The Time Beyond," and "The Hour Between," feeling somewhat lost in time, travelers attempting a piece of chronological navigation without benefit of calendar or chronometer.

Finally, to put an end to the matter they arbitrarily decided upon a theater whose marquee promised them the double treat of, "That Was Yesterday," and "Always Tomorrow." They hadn't wanted a double treat, much less Eddie's Adver-Show, the Louis-O'Rourke fight, Zoo's Who, The Heart of the Andes, and Kolored Kut-Ups, "together with additional shorts and musical features." But that was what they got. Plus an unannounced showing of that later astoundingly successful audience-participation show called, "Are You a Human Being?" And George Pismire, though his identity was not that afternoon discovered, was one of the very first persons to be elected, "Human Being for a Day."

George left the car in the theater's free parking lot and he and Ada entered the theater's foyer. They trod with anticipation upon its deep carpet, looked with some abashment at their unflattering reflections in its dazzlingly lighted mirrors, made their way through its assortment of machines for vending candy, popcorn, cigarettes, hot nuts, sandwiches, perfumes and the like. At last they reached their seats and there recalling the trick after long absence, telescoped their legs and sought between ear and shoulder of the patron in front of them, their small private peephole to the magic of the screen.

At first, judging by sound alone, for their eyes were not yet accustomed to the dark, the Pismires believed the theater to be well filled. All about them they heard either the wares of the vending machines being readied for mastication and swallowing or the mastication and swallowing itself. However, as they began once again to see, they discovered that these sounds were out of all proportion to the number of people making them. The theater, like all the places they had seen that day and the day before was very sparsely filled.

"It's a little depressing isn't it?" Ada whispered, but George was unable to hear her above the tearing of cellophane, the crackle of shells and that peculiar dry complaint which is noisy popcorn's swan song, so to speak, before its final silence.

"Did you say something?" George asked.

"Depressing isn't it?" Ada repeated in a louder voice. "So few people?"

"We came to see the movie, not the people," George reminded her reasonably.

After trying for a little while, however, to make out what was going on in "The Heart of the Andes," George decided to have a small nap until the feature came on. It wasn't that he had no interest in the Andes. It was simply that the camera skipped so rapidly from face to peak to llama that George's less nimble eye was unable to make any satisfactory reconstruction of the resulting montage. For a split second the screen would be occupied by a face; but by the time George had recognized it as such and as one whose weathered seams and folds it might be profitable to explore, the face had been succeeded by a flutter of hands engaged in some perhaps interesting phase of silver mining. Perhaps interesting, perhaps silver mining, for the same hands (or others) were, before George could make up his mind, busying themselves with the saddle girths of a pack train. Then hands and pack train alike whirled past at rocket speed, and as they whirled an unstable landscape accompanied them. It was too much for George.

"Wake me up when the feature comes on, Ada," he said, and with that gift for snatching a moment's sleep, even under the most unlikely circumstances, which has characterized many great men, George Pismire closed his eyes and slept.

What next happened to George Pismire was the result of one of those unforeseen concatenations of events—so engaging to an observer, so painful to a participant. The Kolored Kut Ups, the musicals, the miscellaneous shorts had run their course. Eddie had finished his Adver-Show and the "Are You a Human Being?" broadcast had just gotten under way. George still slept peacefully and Ada, knowing how he disliked such shows had no intention of waking him until "That Was Tomorrow" cast its first shadow across the screen.

The "Are You a Human Being?" show was later augmented and refined, but in outline as in spirit it was then, as later, an hilarious and not unscientific attempt to compare and evaluate the responses of human beings and apes. Or rather of human beings and an ape, for in the entire history of the program only two apes were used: the early and justly famous Mabel, and the later more relaxed but less talented Delecta.

At a time when it seemed that there remained no untried angles from which a producer might approach the radio-quiz, audience-participation program, Milton Smiles (his father was Andrew Smiles, head of the Department of Psychology at the College of Southern California) conceived and produced the "Are You a Human Being?" show. At a time when quiz masters had pitted expert against expert, audience against expert, dub against expert, dub against dub, child against dub, child against child, child against adult, adults of all categories against adults of the same or opposite categories, and finally male against female, and sponsors were asking, "What's left?" Milton Smiles had an answer, "human beings against apes."

It must be admitted that Milton Smiles had the very great benefit of the assistance of his father's knowledge and scientific techniques. Andrew Smiles furnished for his son's program a list of one thousand basic situations for the testing of the humanness of a human being. Before the time of "Smiles' Thousand," human beings were thought to be alike human and it was believed, this being so, that all would register a full one hundred per cent on Smiles' Scale. So far was this from being true, that not only did many human beings appear to be only about forty per cent human at any time, but the humanness of the same individual was shown to be a highly variable quality. Thus, Monday morning might see "A" registering a high eighty-seven per cent on the "Smiles' Scale," while Saturday night would find this same "A" down to a paltry fifty-seven per cent and still, in the matter of humanness, falling. It was this, "Constancy of Variation," or Smiles' Second Law of Psychodynamics;" to give it its textbook name, which reconciled people to having their humanness tested and scored on a public program. For though a man might emerge with a very poor score, no shame attached to the fact since it was known to all that this quite likely meant no more than that the testee was experiencing an off day, humanly speaking.

However, none of this was known to George H. Pismire, sleeping soundly that September afternoon through the shorts and special features of the Belle Granda Theater program. He did not even know when Milton Smiles, Mabel, and Milton's wife and assistant, Belvedere (Mrs. Smiles was the first child born in Belvedere Gardens, a suburb thirty miles south of Los Angeles), came on to the Belle Granda stage. Mabel and Belvedere, though otherwise so unalike, wore like costumes: blue satin shorts and small blush-apple-colored brassières.

The mechanics of the programs were not complex. "Smiles' Thousand" listed, under such heads as love, work, hunger, curiosity, bellicosity, etc., a variety of concrete situations with which to confront an individual, and a scale for rating his responses in terms of their humanness. Milton Smiles' great contribution to showmanship and science, however, was his idea of presenting simultaneously to ape and man situations selected from "Smiles' Thousand." And no one who knows apes (or perhaps man) has been surprised that the ape has frequently rated higher in the quality and quantity of his humanness than man. Time and again it was Mabel, in the face of the best competition the human beings of a radio broadcast audience could offer her, who was crowned "Human Being for a Day." But even Mabel could not surpass George. And those who delight in portents have found it significant that on the day The Pismire Plan saw its inception, George H. Pismire, its author, was publicly designated, "Human Being for a Day."

Ada had found Belvedere and Mabel's similarity of dress amusing. She had no idea that the applause which greeted their appearance was, for the most part, the result of the activities of Milton Smiles' hired claque and she clapped in the belief that she was sharing a general enthusiasm. As soon as the applause died down Milton Smiles asked for volunteers to participate in his program, and his two male assistants ranged up and down the theater ready to spot and escort to the stage any willing performers. In the sparse and unenthusiastic audience they found no volunteers, and at this time Mabel and Belvedere executed as partners an amusing dance, ending with arms extended in invitation to the audience.

The earlier applause had somewhat aroused George. Now, the sound of Ada's spirited smacks just at ear level, together with a sudden painful prod in the neck, given him from the rear by an incoming patron with a protruding handbag, brought him to his feet, partially awake, wholly vertical, one hand thrown up to ward off further attack.

That was all Milton Smiles needed. "A volunteer," he shouted to his assistants. "The man in grey, middle section, halfway back, sixth seat over."

"A volunteer," the assistants echoed heartily, seized George by both arms and had him half way to the stage before he was able to get even one eye fully open.

Someone in the audience noting George's striking resemblance to *the* George H. Pismire, then shouted, "The great George H. Pismire, himself."

At this a spontaneous laugh filled the theater. It would have been as easy for the Belle Granda audience to believe that George Washington had dropped in for the afternoon show as George Pismire. Men like George Pismire simply did not turn up at Belle Granda matinées.

George, still only half awake, stung by the laughter, angered by being made the victim of physical force, and without thinking, declared defiantly, "I *am* George H. Pismire."

The Belle Granda audience though small had a talent for noise. At these words it expressed that talent in laughter. On the stage Milton Smiles threw back his head and showed an audience that needed no showing the classic calisthenics of the belly laugh. To have bagged a natural comedian! That priceless ingredient of every audience-participation broadcast! Milton Smiles thanked God for this man, whoever he might be, who declared himself to be George H. Pismire. Leaning down from the stage he extended his hand. "Welcome to the 'Are You A Human Being' show, George. How's about borrowing one of your Eartheaters to spade up my garden?"

Ada, for whom the march of events up to this point had been almost too rapid for her to follow, now came to George's defense. Rising to her feet, she announced with dignity, "That man is not only George H. Pismire, but I am his wife."

Two natural comedians instead of one! It was beyond either the audience's or Milton Smiles' fondest hopes. And Ada was even funnier than George, for while George looked like a Pismire, *the* Pismire, in fact, Ada looked like neither a Pismire nor the wife of a Pismire.

Milton Smiles bowed in Ada's direction. "Madam," he said, "may I congratulate you upon having the honor of being the wife of one of our most distinguished citizens?"

To this Ada was given no opportunity to reply. George, now on the stage, wide awake and fully aware of the unfortunate publicity which might result from his participation in such a program, made a silencing motion in Ada's direction, who, still standing, seemed once again to intend speech. George saw no means of escape from the situation in which he was entangled, but he did hope to be able to survive what remained of his ordeal in as quiet and unobtrusive a manner as possible.

Ada disregarded his gesture. "George," she began, but George for her own good, as well as his own, cut her off. "Ada," he asked, "will you please be quiet?" and as a third and fourth wave of laughter swept the theater Ada unhappily subsided into her seat.

George, hearing the laughter, understood at once that he had made an unfortunate start toward unobtrusive survival; that nothing so amuses an audience as marital back-talk.

The elements of the first situation chosen by Milton Smiles from "Smiles' Thousand," for the simultaneous testing of George and Mabel, were already on the stage. They were: a strange male (George) with whom Mabel was to be confronted; and a strange female (Belvedere) with whom George was to be confronted.

"Mabel, this is George. George Pismire that is." Milton's assistants had no need of displaying their cards saying "laughter" after this sally.

"George, this is Belvedere. You may call her dear for short, if you like."

Milton now turned to his audience. "The purpose of our program, as I explained to you earlier, is to test George's and Mabel's humanness. George is a human being. Mabel is an ape. But is Mabel more of a human being than George? Is George more of an ape than Mabel? Who knows? But when we have finished these tests we will know. You will know and George and Mabel will know. And of these two, one, either Mabel, the ape, or George Pismire, the human being, will be crowned "Human Being for a Day."

"I have here a number of tests," he continued, "prepared for this program by an eminent psychologist—a man who knows why human beings act like human beings, why apes act like apes and why sometimes vice versa. These tests I shall present simultaneously to George and Mabel. Pardon me, Mabel and George. Should always mention the lady first even if she is an ape. Isn't that so, George?"

George, inflexibly determined to be unobtrusive, nodded his head in agreement.

"Now," said Milton, "at the completion of these tests the contestant with the highest rating in humanness will not only be crowned, 'Human Being for a Day,' he will be presented, with the compliments of Drought, a full carton of twelve lovely little jars of Drought, the modern anti-perspiration aid, your personal guarantee of a long dry spell."

George looked at Mabel and hoped she would win.

"The first situation, folks, is one we are familiar with, one called, in language we can all understand, 'Boy Meets Girl.' "

Milton then repeated his earlier words of introduction. "Mabel, this is George. George this is Belvedere. Now folks, boy has met girl. Who will display in this age-old situation the greater humanness? The ape or the man? I do not know. You do not know. To that question only George and Mabel have the answers. George, Mabel, the stage is all yours."

What next happened was, in the long run, very fortunate for George though at the time he found it uncomfortable, embarrassing and even frightening. Mabel, moving swiftly in her rocking, semi-upright manner came to George's side. First, she took his hand. Then she vaulted onto a wicker table, in her impetuosity upsetting a wicker basket filled with gladioli. She threw her long muscular arms about George's neck, pressed her cheek to his and rocked him back and forth on his heels, crooning as she did so a throaty monody, which, while undoubtedly affectionate in intent, sounded menacing to George. He bolted and ran.

But not far. Mabel was not only younger than George and in better condition, she was better adapted in talent, as well as in construction for swift locomotion. She overhauled him just as he reached the grand piano. For a split second George contemplated throwing himself under the piano but two things prevented him from doing this. First of all he realized that where he could throw himself, Mabel could even more easily throw herself, and that in this case he would be there to receive her when she arrived. Mabel, as countless later programs proved, was an intelligent, modest, amiable ape, though George, cornered in the curve of the grand piano, would not have chosen those words for her. But beyond his realization of the uselessness of throwing himself under the piano was his conviction of the unsuitability of any such action for George H. Pismire. So, mastering his fear and repulsion, he courageously turned to face Mabel.

Milton Smiles, at his microphone, was beside himself with pleasure at the turn events had taken. He described the goings-on with great gusto and satisfaction to his invisible audience. His visible audience needed no description of his to add to their vociferous delight and they shouted impartial encouragement to George and Mabel, some crying, "Grab her George," and others, "Kiss him Mabel."

Milton Smiles, unlike some of his audience and more particularly George himself, felt no concern for Mabel's actions, knowing as he did her fundamental amiability. And though her behavior on this occasion was unaccountable and was never afterwards repeated, there are those who believe that she, with her mysterious animal instinct, understood that George Pismire was no ordinary man and was attempting as best she could to make this understanding known.

However that may be, it is true that when George turned to face her, she, seeming to recognize some core of authority in him, took him gently by the hand and led him back to the center of the stage. Though she continued her nuzzling, fondling and caressing with a strength of which she, though not George, was unaware, her expression became peculiarly benign. And while there were moments when George found it almost impossible to breathe, so firm was Mabel's clasp, he endured it as stoically as he might. For he realized that time was passing; that however painful it was to have his ears bent over upon themselves, his Adam's apple dented and his nose flattened, Mabel was saving him from having to take any but a secondary part in the "Are You a Human Being?" program.

Time was indeed passing. Slowly for George, but all too quickly for the audience. Never before had the Belle Granda afforded them such a program. A man who declared himself to be George H. Pismire, an affectionate and muscular monkey and the two of them engaged in a kind of wrestling match to determine which was the more human! They had never seen the like, they never expected to see the like again and when Belvedere Smiles in the program's final minutes disengaged George from Mabel's embrace they clamored happily for more.

"That is all folks," Milton Smiles told them, "our time is just ending. It is my great pleasure to announce to you that George H. Pismire is winner of this afternoon's contest for the title of 'Human Being for a Day.'"

Although the audience had nothing against George, their clapping, upon this announcement, changed to booing. Mabel, the audience believed, had behaved in a most human manner: she had seen a man who appealed to her and she had pursued him. What could possibly be more human? Milton Smiles then explained to them that while it is human for a female to pursue, it is just as human for a male to flee. This George had done, and as a result he and Mabel were tied in their humanness rating on the "Smiles' Scale."

"It is the policy of this program," Milton continued suavely, "to award the prize, in case of ties, to visiting contestants. We don't want to show any favoritism to the home team, do we Mabel?" Mabel, who still had eyes only for George, made no visible response either to this question or to the pat with which Milton accompanied it.

The audience, with the matter thus explained, gave over their booing and cheered lustily as Milton Smiles placed upon George Pismire's head a large gilt crown lettered, "Human Being for a Day," and as, at the same time, Belvedere Smiles placed in his hands a carton of Drought.

"Congratulations, Mr. George H.—H. for human being I presume?—Pismire. You are now officially recognized as a human being, and if you find Drought effective, as you will, will you kindly tell your friends about it? Come on folks, a big hand for George H. Pismire, 'Human Being for a Day,' and Drought user."

George, under cover of the applause began rather waveringly to make his way off the stage. His ribs ached, his hair was disordered, a considerable portion of his shirt tail hung outside his trousers. In spite of this, because the ordeal was at last over, he was not unhappy; unfortunately for him, however, the ordeal was not yet over.

"Just a minute, George," Milton Smiles said. "Mabel wants to kiss you goodbye. Mabel seems to kind of like you, George." At this understatement the audience once more laughed and shouted, "Let her kiss you goodbye, George," "Have a heart, George," and the like.

To this final indignity, George, out of no conviction that quietness was the best policy, but simply because he was too tired for further resistance, submitted. Then he, "Human Being for a Day," but with crown sadly askew, limped down into the blessed darkness where Ada awaited him.

For some time after reaching the car George sat in silence, head a little forward, package of Drought under his arm. It was still only mid-afternoon and cars continued to drive on to the parking lot, their occupants pausing for a space to gaze at George before hurrying on, hopeful of catching at least one of Belle Granda's twin features.

Two middle-aged women, in slacks which did not become bifurcated until near the knee, attracted by the crown which George still wore, stopped long enough to read its inscription.

"Human Being for a Day," repeated one wonderingly.

"I guess he's proud of it," her companion said.

"Which do you mean," the first woman asked, "the human being part or the for a day?"

Ada was unable to catch the reply and George, deep in thoughts of his own, had not even heard the question. Ada, to protect him from any such further comment, reached over, took the crown from George's head and placed it, together with the Drought, on the back seat with the two Perfecto-Pottery mugs.

"Everything's all right now," she said in a tone better suited to quieting a child than to reassuring a man who has just been publicly squeezed and kissed by a monkey.

George, however, held his tongue and Ada asked finally, "Mabel didn't hurt you, did she, George?"

This question George ignored. How it was possible for anyone to believe that a hundred and fifty-seven pound man could be embraced by an enthusiastic six hundred and fifty-pound ape without being hurt he could not understand. He inhaled and exhaled carefully, then made that statement which has become the third of the four corner stones upon which The Pismire Plan rests. First, George Pismire had recognized the general evil: "The people are not getting what they want." Next, this general precept had become specific: "The world has come to a sorry pass when dogs fare better than man." Now, came resolution.

He lifted his shoulders (though still breathing carefully) and said, "Ada, no one is going to make a monkey out of me."

And while George's pronoun here was singular, Ada understood by his tone that his intention was plural. No one, while George could help it, was going to make a monkey out of the human race.

Ada knew also, from long experience what that tone of voice meant: it meant inflexible resolution. It meant change, action, achievement.

"No, George," she said, "certainly not."

George pressed the starting button of the car with energy, drove out of the parking lot and headed once more toward La Pismirada. The sky had clouded over and the afternoon was now a little sultry. Although there was no chance at this time of the year of rain, hard steel-colored thunderheads clustered heavily about Mt. Wilson's upper reaches, and there was the thought of rain in the mind. The sky over the valley was mackereled and the outline of the foothills was softened by an opalescent haze. Noticing the closeness of the air and the shimmering colors, Ada thought that it was a little as if they were traveling inside a shell, as if the world had become a great empty abalone shell.

"Abalone shell colors," she said to George indicating the sky and the haze, and hoping to take his mind off what had just happened.

George nodded without much interest. They were passing through the outskirts of Los Angeles and it was the people of this city, not the distant haze nor the shell-like colors, which engaged his attention. He thought of them—wandering, unemployed, unable to get what they wanted, faring in many cases worse than dogs, made monkeys of on every hand. He drove slowly, brooding, examining faces, speculating upon the purpose or lack of it expressed in the clustering together of the city's thousands of non-workers. On the far side of the city, in one of its distant suburbs where buildings peter out into open lots, and where such homes as there are stand in the midst of small commercial enterprises—clock repair shops, key makers, delicatessens and the like—he noticed a snakelike line of human beings.

"I wonder what can be the purpose of that line?" Ada asked. George had no idea, but he was of a mind to find out. Filled with so many questions which he could not answer he did not choose to ignore a question whose answer lay close at hand, free for the asking.

"I'll inquire for you, Ada," he said, driving the car to the curb and turning off its engine.

The line, which he estimated must include not less than two hundred people, angled across an empty, weed-covered lot—though the weeds were now dead, dust-colored and dust-dry—to terminate at the door of a dust-colored, ramshackle, little bungalow. There were both men and women in the line, both young and old. Most stood, though some had camp stools or boxes upon which they sat. A policeman was posted about half way along the line, although his stance was not that of the law, alert for wrongdoing, but of a sympathetic observer, or even friend.

The great peculiarity of the assemblage—apart from the fact that people should be found thus lined up at all—was the strange, unchanging position of the arms and hands of those in the line. The hands of all were held directly in front of the body at about waist height, and there was none of that aimless gesturing and shifting of position which ordinarily characterizes a group of waiting people. The sight of these unmoving people under the steel-colored sky, dead weeds about their feet, their goal, apparently, a falling-to-pieces bungalow, gave Ada a very strange feeling.

"George," she asked, unconsciously lowering her voice, "what do you think's wrong with those people?"

George, who wore trifocals, had, after squinting intently, been able to make out at least one thing that was wrong. "They're all hanging on to a wire," he said.

Ada, still unable to see the wire, said "You mean they have to—hang on—to a wire to hold themselves up?"

"Certainly not," George replied. "I should have said, they all have their hands on a wire."

"Do you think they could all have gotten an electric shock?" Ada asked, for she had heard that such victims were unable to loosen themselves from a charged wire once they had touched it.

"Certainly not," George replied again, for he had noticed that newcomers, placing themselves at the end of the line, took hold of that part of the wire which was free of hands. He felt quite sure that whatever else this strange scene might be it was not one of voluntary wholesale electrocution.

Before Ada could ask another question George got out of the car. "Ada," he said, "I think I'll just see what the situation is here. I won't be gone but a few minutes."

As he approached the wire George was able to see that most of those who clasped it had their eyes closed and that there was upon these faces, thus sealed against the outside world, so naked a look of searching that he was abashed to gaze upon them. Toward the end of the line he saw a wire-clasper with open eyes, a well-dressed man of thirty-five or so, and to him he thought questions might be addressed.

"Would you mind telling me the meaning of all this?" George asked courteously. However, before the first two of these words were out of his mouth, the wire-clasper shut his eyes, and George felt more rebuffed by this than had the man turned his back upon him and walked away.

To pass off this snub, George pretended an interest in the wire itself, which appeared to be of that thin copper variety commonly used for radio aerials. Some distance up the line where the wire was uncovered for several inches, by any hand, George put out a tentative finger. Before he was able to make even a preliminary contact the officer was at his side. "Sorry, buddy," he said in a low voice, "but you'll have to go to the end of the line. No crowding in's allowed here."

Heartened by the sound of a voice amidst the unnatural silence, George spoke, perhaps more loudly than he knew.

"A little information . . ." he began, but was stopped in mid-sentence by an angry murmur from the wire-claspers.

The policeman drew him away from the line and said in a half whisper, "I'll be glad to give you any information you want, but you'll have to be quiet. And if it's emanations you're after you'll have to go to the end of the line."

"Emanations?" George asked, amazed.

"Certainly," the officer answered. "What did you think?"

George shook his head. He felt far past thinking.

"Where are you from?" the officer asked.

George told him and the officer said with a good deal of sharpness, "What do you easterners take us Californians for, anyway? Do you think we're fools enough to stand around hanging on to a copper wire just for the hell of it?"

George, who felt himself to be a citizen of the entire country, hated accusations of insularity. "Certainly not," he said. "My wife's a Native Daughter and no one thinks more highly of the State than I."

"Well," the officer continued in a milder tone, "you can't ever tell. We get all sorts of nuts in from out of the State. Always have, always will, and it's particularly bad just now in these hard times."

About the hard times George, as well informed as any man on earth, had no desire to talk. The wire, the wire-holders, the emanations, these were what interested him.

"What," he asked, "are these emanations of or from?"

"Hosmer," said the officer.

This made very little sense to George and he hesitated for some time before venturing another question. "Where do these emanations originate?"

"Inside the house."

Since the officer volunteered no further information George asked with some diffidence, "What's inside the house?"

"Hosmer," said the officer.

Before George had any opportunity to inquire further concerning Hosmer two happenings engaged his attention. First, a young woman seated on a camp stool midway along the line was seized with what George took to be a fit of ague. She shook violently, hairpins fell from her hair, her purse slid off her lap, and her face, with its closed eyes, took on the look of a visionary in an advanced stage of entrancement.

"A positive charge!" exclaimed the officer in a pleased voice, "that's the fifth this afternoon."

"A positive charge?" asked George.

"Don't see anything negative about it, do you?" said the policeman.

George didn't, if it was put like that. The young lady's contortions were indeed so energetic and they continued for so long, that he became concerned for her well-being.

The officer reassured him. "Do her good," he said. "Does 'em all good. There's been all sorts of cures here, migraine, ulcers, arthritis, I don't know what all. Though it's not just sick people who come here. Not by a long shot. No more than just sick people go to church. They all come."

"Do they all . . . have fits?" George asked.

"Fits!" the officer repeated the word in such a manner as to show George that he did not consider it a suitable one. "That," he said pointing to the young lady, "is called the Ripples. The Hosmer Ripples." As if anticipating George's next question, he said, "Some get the Ripples, some don't. You don't have to have the Ripples, though," he explained, "to get a positive reaction from the emanations. Some who take it the quietest get the most benefit."

The Ripples of the young lady in question were beginning to ease up. Presently she opened her eyes, readjusted her hair, picked up her purse and with a very sweet smile for those about her who had eyes open to see it, took her stool and walked over to a large, blue, two-handled vase which George had noticed standing in a particularly thick cluster of dried weeds. There, opening her purse she took out some coins and dropped them, clinking, on to others which, to judge by the sound, lay not far below the mouth of the vase.

"Do they have to pay for emanations?"

"Pay!" said the policeman who, George was tardily recognizing, was an out-and-out Hosmer adherent (who or whatever Hosmer was). "No one has to pay a cent. Those who want to, make donations . . . love-gifts, they call it. The Chief keeps an officer around here off and on just to check on them, but Hosmer don't ever charge. Hosmer's not licensed to run a business, of course, besides I don't know what the license would be for if he was. But charge? No. Love-gifts. That's all there ever is."

"Is Hosmer in there now?" George asked indicating the house.

"You saw *her,* didn't you?" The policeman nodded in the direction of the young woman who was now making her way energetically up the street. "Do you think just any old piece of copper wire is going to make a young lady act like that?"

George, who knew he knew nothing about young ladies, now decided he also knew nothing about copper wire, so forbore replying. He took the officer's answer to mean, however, that Hosmer was in the house and he decided then and there that he would not leave until he had seen . . . him . . . George supposed. Though the entire situation was so unusual that Hosmer, for all George knew, might just as well be a woman as man; or even, though he fervently hoped not, another ape. Believing that it would be best to say nothing of his intention to this pro-Hosmer officer, he merely asked if there would be any objection to his walking along the line to observe the people.

George's steady, responsible appearance stood him in good stead now, as always, and the officer said, "It'll be O.K. so long as you keep your distance and keep quiet. This isn't any side show we're running here."

George kept his distance and he kept quiet. He was naturally inconspicuous looking and the worshipers (though George supposed some other word would be more suitable for people adhering to a copper wire like crows to a phone line) in their search for Hosmer emanations paid him little heed. Even the officer, noting his respectful and unobtrusive manner, transferred his interest to a new case of the Ripples.

Aware of this shift in interest, George did not stop at the head of the line but continued without pause around a corner of the forlorn looking bungalow. Making his way around a second corner he came upon an unmowed, half-dead lawn. This dying grass plot was bisected by a cement walk, itself crazily cracked and tilted by the roots of a scraggly pepper tree, the better part of whose growth seemed to have gone underground.

George walked across this dry grass and onto the cement walk. He opened a screen door, proceeded through a screened porch whose only piece of furniture, if it could be called that, was a faded green hammock, one end of which trailed in the dust on the floor, and entered what he took to be the living room, though it was hard to say just what purpose this room served. In its center a cot of the kind which used to be called sanitary was open and covered with bed clothes and near it an old fashioned flat-topped washing machine served as a table for books and magazines.

The next room George entered was, quite clearly, the kitchen. In it, and using the large cast-iron cook stove as a foot rest, a shoeless man in a tip-tilted chair sat comfortably reading. George closed the door behind him with purposeful noisiness but the reader read on, undisturbed. This man did not appear to George to be a likely source of emanations and, appearances aside, there were no signs of the copper wire about.

After a considerable period had passed in which the reader continued to take no notice of him, George, with a preliminary throat clearing to announce his presence, asked, "Would you be kind enough to tell me where I can find someone—a person, I take it—by the name of Hosmer?"

The reader lowered his magazine and turned sideways toward George. The face George was now able to see was almost entirely cheek-bones and eyes and it terminated abruptly in a neck which was almost entirely Adam's apple and tendons. The man was about George's age, but time had weathered, not insulated him. He wore a striped jersey instead of a shirt and his khaki colored wash pants were held up by suspenders which lay in deep grooves across his shoulders.

"Hosmer Wright?" the man asked after a pause in which he returned George's stare.

"About the last name I'm not sure," George admitted. "However, the person I'm looking for is the cause of all that." George pointed to where, through the glaze of dust and fly specks which obscured the kitchen window, the wire and those who clung to it could be seen.

"The emanator," George explained, though the word, as he spoke it, had a foolishly imperial sound in his mouth.

"Emanator," the man repeated with a slight, though not uncivil snort. "That's a new one!"

The man had curious eyes. They were exceptionally light, either blue or gray and more like colored transparencies stretched across empty eye sockets than the usual glassy protuberances of a curving eyeball. As a possible source of emanations, the man was beginning to appear more credible to George.

"Are you," George asked, trying to be more specific and less grandiose, "the other end of the wire?"

As the man's flat eyes continued their unblinking stare, George had the feeling that they, like litmus paper, might be capable of changing color to indicate the character of what they encountered.

The eyes did not, however, change and the man said, "The other end of the wire? First time I was ever called that either." After a slight pause he added, "I don't recollect that I heard you knock."

George Pismire was not often abashed but this continued, flat stare made him a little uneasy. For the second time that day he took out one of his cards. "I didn't," he confessed. "I was afraid to call attention to the fact that I was entering. I thought it might not be permitted."

"It ain't," the man replied. "They want peace," he gestured toward the line outside the kitchen window, "and I don't do a thing to stop them from getting it. I want peace and the least they can do is to leave me alone."

"I'm not one of them," George explained. "All I want is information." He had supposed that the Pismire name would carry weight, even in this dusty outpost of suburbia; but seemingly, it did not. The man half doubled his card, then let it flip into an orange box labeled "Sunkist" and filled with trash. George saw the Pismire name fall among tea leaves.

"Are you Hosmer?" he persisted in spite of this inhospitality.

"Hosmer Wright," the man admitted grudgingly.

"Mr. Wright," George said, "forgive me for intruding, but that is really an extraordinary exhibition out there." George, as Mr. Wright had done before, indicated the line outside the house, enlivened at the minute by another case of the Ripples.

Mr. Wright's eyes followed George's to the window. "Ain't it," he moodily agreed.

"That wire, Mr. Wright," George began, "it's just the ordinary variety of copper aerial wire?"

"Copper," Mr. Wright answered, "tin, steel, aluminum. I don't know. A wire's a wire to me."

"Well," said George reasonably, "just what kind of wire did you ask for when you bought it?"

"I didn't buy it."

George looked at the old fellow, all sinew, tendon and thews, as if he might be some kind of a spider capable of spinning wire out of his inwards.

"*They* put it up," Mr. Wright said, still peering morosely at the line.

"Why?" George asked.

"Emanations, they say."

"They say!" George repeated amazed. "What do you say, Mr. Wright?"

"Not a thing," said Mr. Wright. "Not a damn word if I can help myself." He held up his magazine which he had clasped over one finger. "I read. When I get a chance," he added, not very courteously, George thought.

George now noticed that the kitchen was lined with knee-high stacks of magazines. They were magazines new to George, but some of them had very interesting pictures on their covers: masked men, cowboys on rearing horses, elegant females with bosoms—as George was convinced they should be—attached.

Following George's glance Mr. Wright said, "There's a world of things a man'd never know anything about without reading. Here I sit, and taste it all. How people can mill around in this dusty little world with so little curiosity, I don't know. Why, the world's full of remarkable things, if a man'll only take the trouble to do a little reading. Now take this story here," he said, holding up his magazine, but before he could continue George interrupted him, convinced that even a magazine with such a cover would be unable to furnish anything comparable to the Hosmer line, its emanations, Ripples and love-gifts.

"Mr. Wright," George said, "I'm a frequent reader myself, but I must confess that that wire, those people and you, yourself, interest me a good deal more than anything I'd ever expect to find in print. You said, Mr. Wright, that they say you emanate. Do you?"

Mr. Wright put his magazine down on the cast-iron stove with an angry slap. "Do I look like a man who emanates?" he asked.

"You do and you don't," George replied truthfully.

"I could say the same of you," Mr. Wright retorted, "and of every damn fool out there. You do and you don't. Emanate! What do they think I am? Some kind of a holy porcupine shooting out my quills at them?"

George, who liked a clear-cut answer to a question, worded one for Mr. Wright. "It is your considered opinion then that you do not emanate?" Mr. Wright, however, refused his cue and continued to stare obstinately out of the window.

George tried another tack. "This wire. Is it attached somewhere to your person?"

"I wouldn't touch that damn wire," Mr. Wright said.

"Surely, if you don't emanate," George began, "there'd be no harm. . . ."

"I don't emanate," Mr. Wright interrupted. "No ifs. But how do I know about them?" He pointed to the line. "Hundreds of 'em all hipped on emanating and all shooting emanations in my direction for all I know. No sir, I wouldn't touch that wire with a ten-foot pole."

"Well," George said soothingly, "it comes in here, though, doesn't it?"

"It comes in here, all right. They see to that. Tied to the stove; but that's as near as I get to the damn thing."

Stepping to the side of the stove next the window George saw the wire, firmly looped about one of the stove's rear legs. He stood for some time regarding wire, stove, and Mr. Wright, himself, stockinged feet on top of the stove.

"That stove does 'em all the good they need," Mr. Wright said with satisfaction. As George continued to stand, staring, he said, "Why don't *you* take hold of the wire, Pismire? Maybe *you* emanate."

George had none of Mr. Wright's sensitiveness about being a possible source of emanations and he had been filled, since entering the room, with an unaccountable desire to see and touch the wire.

There they were outside . . . the people . . . the people he had been watching for the past two days . . . and they were finding a pleasure . . . satisfaction . . . peace, whatever it was they *were* finding, in clinging to this copper wire which they had not found in the Belle Granda's twin features, or The Little Country Store. These were the people who did not stick frogs, eat Pre-Fabs, or buy Perfecto-Pottery ware. These were the people he had seen in clumps along the highways, in knots outside, but not in the thousand roadside emporiums. These were the people caught in the Big Pinch, the people for whom the human environment had become unattractive . . . even impossible. George looked through Hosmer Wright's murky kitchen window at the patient, wire-clutching line. These are the people, he thought (using, as oldsters do, an outmoded slang), period. And looking, he was filled with an overwhelming longing to feel, whatever it was they felt; to be at one with them, even though the link connecting them be nothing more substantial than a length of copper wire. Nevertheless, as he bent to unwind the wire from around the leg of the stove, his fingers developed a certain reluctance of their own. He remembered the young lady with the Ripples. If anyone had ever emanated, she certainly had, and the idea of encountering wire-borne waves of such a nature as might have their origin in her, or one like her, gave him considerable pause. He straightened up and thought twice. He would not care to come down with a case of Hosmer Ripples in the Hosmer kitchen and under the flat, light Hosmer stare.

Hosmer Wright, noticing that George was postponing the moment of wire clutching, said, "Go on, pick it up. Give it a twitch or two. That'll convince 'em we've got something pretty high powered on tap here in the kitchen this afternoon."

That was all it took! That decided George! That utter disregard by a fellow human being of a condition so serious and a solution so pitiable. Without a moment's further hesitancy, no longer thinking of what the result might be to himself, but only of the people, George Pismire unwound and lightly clasped the wire.

Hosmer Wright, when he saw no change in George returned to his reading. "It says here," he said, after some minutes had passed, "that the women on the Island of Melii, far from being . . ." but George heard no more of that island or those women. It wasn't that anything esoteric happened; that the wire vibrated or tingled or buzzed; that it became hot or cold, went slack or became taut.

The wire continued to feel like a wire, cool at first then becoming warmer as George's live hand clasped it. His hand felt like a hand, comfortably curving, then as time passed, becoming somewhat cramped. He continued to see Hosmer Wright and he heard him turn the rough, dry pages of his magazine with a sound of distant corn being shucked. He continued to see the line outside, patient in the waning light. He heard a cricket, refreshed by the growing coolness, begin its evening song. But though he saw and heard these things, it was as if with an outer and superficial circle of his mind. Deep within this outer circle, a concentric inner circle saw and heard what the surface mind could not detect.

This is, of course, the scene, made familiar to all of us in Edmund Walther's heroic painting now housed under the Rotunda in Los Angeles. And though Walther's own rather unimaginative title, "Pismire and the Wire," has been supplanted by the more popular, "Birth of The Pismire Plan," The Pismire Plan did not actually have its birth in the Hosmer Wright kitchen. That is one of those homey myths with which we delight to clothe our great. The Pismire Plan, unromantic and unexciting as the fact may be, had its birth in the Pismire car where George, after the "Experience of the Wire," made to Ada the Fourth Statement; that final and essential corner stone upon which the edifice of The Pismire Plan now rests.

Pismire, in the Hosmer Wright kitchen, dreamed in essences, Pismire size. The Pismire Plan is another thing entirely, the Pismire dream cut down to the dimensions of those for whom it was intended. The Plan, obviously, could be no more than the channeling of such parts of the Pismire vision as Pismire's fellow citizens were capable of handling at this particular period of their development.

But it was a wonderful hour! Or two! George Pismire lost track of time. Shadows lengthened. The cricket solo became a cricket chorus. The sheaf of leaves which Hosmer Wright's right hand held flat became nothing to that which his left hand spanned. The evening wind blew in off of the Pacific and the pepper tree began its feathery rustle. Everything changed. Everything that is except the line . . . it alone was patient, unchanging: men and women searching at nightfall for that which they had been searching when the day began. What was that? What was it, exactly? George Pismire has never said. But touching the wire those searchers touched, he knew the lack which had sent them there; he knew the places from which they had come empty handed; he knew what they had endured and he planned for them a belated compensation.

Hosmer Wright finished his magazine, arose and placed it on the stack of its kind. "Well, Pismire," he said, "the show's over. The folks have all gone home."

George Pismire knew this as well as Hosmer Wright. Not only had his eyes told him that the patient searchers had given over searching for the night, but the wire told him. Some virtue had left it. Still he was reluctant to part from it, give over the attitude of contemplation (hand curved, head forward, eyes on the pathway worn through the dead weeds by the feet of the wire-claspers), abandon the harmonies of contemplation.

Of this Hosmer Wright, of course, knew nothing. "Time to fetch in the love-gifts," he said cheerfully.

Voice and action were alike painful to George. It was painful for him to leave the future in which, for the time of the "Experience of the Wire," he had been living. It was painful to return to a present which by contrast, now that his eyes were opened to what might be, was a thousand times more illogical, unfair and distasteful than it had been before. Nevertheless, he re-wound the wire about the stove leg, then rising, he said quietly to Hosmer Wright, who had no idea that he was hearing the words of a dedicated man, "I'll walk outside with you, if you don't mind."

"Any emanations?" Hosmer Wright asked with a sidelong glance, as they went down the unsteady back steps.

"Nothing I would care to so name," George answered mildly.

"Feel like you's going to get the Ripples?"

"No, I can't say that I did."

"Wire feel queer?"

"No."

"Tingle, maybe?"

"Nothing like that."

Hosmer Wright, who had no other words than these with which to explore the mystic, transfiguring "Experience of the Wire," left off questioning George, and the two men, there in the dust and the weeds, quietly parted: Hosmer, to carry to his shabby, falling-apart bungalow the afternoon's love-gifts; George, to take to Ada—and mankind—that greater gift, The Pismire Plan.

Ada, who had felt some natural resentment at being left alone in a hot car for half a sultry afternoon was prepared to speak sharply to George. However, as he approached, she was able to see, even in the fading light that, in the interval of their separation, some tremendous experience had befallen him. With wifely intuition, she opened the car door without a word. After George had seated himself she placed her hand on his.

"George?" she asked.

As if answering her question George turned to her and said, "Ada, those who endure must be recompensed."

The fourth corner stone was in place. The Pismire Plan could now be erected.

Part II

Ada slept until late next morning. Not only was her own bed at La Pismirada extremely restful after the discomforts of the night before at the Anne Hathaway, but George had kept her awake until all hours talking of The Plan.

After their many days on the road and their many nights, each in a different auto court or hotel, Ada was scarcely able to realize on first awakening, that she was at home and that Elsie would soon be up with hot coffee and fresh orange juice. However, when she saw outside her windows, not the wrecking lot adjoining some auto court, but La Pismirada's royal palms, and on her ceiling the glancing lights reflected off La Pismirada's swimming pool, she knew that their journey was completed and that she was indeed at home. And while it had been very pleasant to drive quietly across country without the stir which the Pismire name always aroused, it was even pleasanter to be once more at La Pismirada enjoying the comforts to which the Pismire name (and money) had accustomed her.

Turning toward George's bed with some idea of communicating these feelings to him Ada saw that George had arisen earlier and, without awakening her, left the room. Looking at his tossed covers and rumpled pillow, all that he had said the night before, or such at least of his statements as she had then been able to understand, began to come back to her. She remembered particularly his final words when long after midnight, he finally snapped off his light. "Ada," he had said, "a new day is dawning."

Ada, awakening in that new day and recalling the extraordinary changes which George had outlined, was unable to console herself, as many other women might have done, with the thought that her husband's dream would remain a dream. Whatever George Pismire dreamed, rose up, very soon, concrete and durable. Ada's forty years with him did not give her the least reason to hope that he was not at that very minute setting into motion the machinery which would bring ten thousand people to La Pismirada, fill every billboard and newspaper in the state with R.A.P. notices and the house itself with dozens of Eartheater young men diverted to the purposes of The Plan.

The Plan, The Plan, The Plan! George's talk the night before had brandished that word like a sword, held it aloft like a torch!

"Ada," he had said, this in the car, winding homeward across the dark hills to La Pismirada, "for two days you have seen in little the face of our country. You have seen the whole in a hundred-yard strip along one highway: entertainment that does not entertain" (George's ribs still pained him) "food that does not nourish, objects that horrify, until finally the people, rather than pay their money for these things, part with what little they have for the pleasures of hanging on to a copper wire in search of questionable emanations. Ada, do these facts say nothing to you?"

To Ada, sleepy after her night in the Anne Hathaway, bilious after her Pre-Fab (in spite of the good Doggy Dinner), overwrought after watching George's pursuit by an ape, these facts said little more to her than that it would be very pleasant to get home. They said that at La Pismirada such facts could be ignored. Knowing, however, how selfish, how self-centered such an admission would sound to George, on fire with concern for his fellow men, she kept quiet.

When she did not reply, George said, "The one highway, the one hundred-yard radius, the two-day journey! The periphery only. Think of the condition of the tissues!"

Just at that moment, Ada remembered, they had met a convoy of trucks surging downward from the crest of the grade above them and George had given his entire attention to the driving. But as soon as the throbbing confusion of the Diesels was behind them George had returned to The Plan.

"Ada, has no diagnosis suggested itself to you, no remedies?"

None had. But even now, in the midst of La Pismirada's cheerful morning sounds, sonorities of mocking bird song and gardener's whistle mixing with the hum of distant tractors, Ada could hear George's solemn voice. "Ada, the time has come when the men and women who endure must be recompensed."

"Recompensed?" she had asked. "You mean paid, George?" She had been slow to follow George, and though she blamed herself for this, she also excused herself. Not only had she been very weary, but George, his mind progressing toward truth by inspiration's great intuitive leaps, had had difficulty in adapting his pace to that of one less swift.

Though he had tried. "Paid," he said, "recompensed, compensated, reimbursed, what you will."

"By endure, George, you mean . . . ?"

"Endure, suffer, bear, be victims of, put up with."

Word by word, phrase by phrase, example by example, brilliantly, patiently, George had exposited and explained. Still all had not been clear to Ada. "A reversal is past due . . ." George said. "Whereas in the past men and women have been content to pay for the privileges of acquiring . . . seeing . . . hearing . . . eating . . . possessing . . . it is obvious that this convention is on the verge of breaking up. Indignities . . . enormities . . . puerilities . . . will not be paid for . . . the shoe is about to be put upon the other foot."

Ada, now remembering these vivid phrases, remembered also, with inward wincing, the small female specificness of many of her own questions. How niggling she must have seemed to George!

"George," she had asked, "do you mean that if I ate a Pre-Fab, I would be paid for it?"

"Yes," replied George, "in part, that is exactly what I mean."

"Well," said Ada, "that is where your Plan breaks down. I wouldn't eat another Pre-Fab for any amount of money."

"Under certain conditions, Ada, you would. If you needed money, badly enough, you would. I grant it wouldn't be pleasant, but people in need of money can not very often concern themselves with pleasure."

"Could you be paid to be hugged by another ape?" Ada countered.

"Yes," said George obstinately, "under certain circumstances I could be. Though the sum would have to be considerable," he added truthfully, "and I would hope for a smaller animal than Mabel."

"Would you . . ." Ada had again started to ask, but George had refused to be diverted by these small special cases from The Plan's broad universal scope.

"Can't you see, Ada, that man's entire man-made environment has become almost unendurable? That he can't go on this way much longer without risking total breakdown? That new inducements must be offered to him to make his predicament more tolerable?"

"But how, George?"

"To begin with, Ada, in one month's time there will be available, at La Pismirada, ten thousand Patrons."

"Patrons?" Ada asked, bewildered. "Ten thousand!"

"More later," George replied, his mind racing far ahead of hers. "Ten thousand the first month."

"Patrons?" Ada asked again. "What for?"

"For the R.A.P.S."

"Raps?"

"No, no, R.A.P.S. The Pismire Rent A Patron Service."

"A Patron . . . is a person, George?"

"Certainly. What did you think?"

Ada was far too bewildered to think at all. "I just wanted to be sure. Do you suppose a person will want to be rented as a Patron, George?"

Though Ada was now able to see that she had then only asked her Pre-Fab question in another way, George had been very patient with her.

"He will. He would far rather be rented as a Patron, and be paid for what he has to endure, than continue as here-to-before. The pay will be good and the life, though not without its irritations, will not be monotonous. And each Patron will have two or three hours of healthful outdoor activity here at La Pismirada to strengthen him for such occupational hazards and hardships as he may encounter in his work. You saw them yourself, Ada. The unemployed! The dissatisfied! The frustrated! Don't you think they'd like to be purposefully employed again—even if the work should be distasteful?"

Ada supposed that this might be true. But other aspects of The Plan had not yet become clear to her.

"It seems strange to think that owners will be willing to pay money for Patrons when it has always been supposed that the matter should be the other way around."

"I'm glad you put the word, supposed, in there, Ada. In the first place whose supposition has this been, that of the few or the many?"

"Why of the few," Ada had been forced to admit.

"Does that seem like a very democratic procedure to you, Ada?"

"No, but I had always supposed. . . ."

"Supposed, supposed!" George interrupted. "It was supposed that the sun circled the earth. It was supposed the earth was flat. But finally the earth is governed, not by supposition, but by fact."

"What if the owner doesn't see the facts? You can't force him."

"Force?" George asked. "Who spoke of force? He'll see the truth, never fear. I'll teach him."

"Teach him?"

"Advertise," George said, using the current word. "That will convince him."

Ada, though she herself had every kind of faith in George, now had the feeling that it was his wish she become the mouthpiece for all the naïve doubts with which The Plan would be assailed.

"Perhaps the owners won't be convinced. Perhaps they won't believe."

This was naïve beyond anything George had expected to encounter and he had been unable to repress an impatient snort. "Ada, no matter what a man's convictions are in the beginning, after twenty-five years of practice he becomes a believer. First, the narcotic for the disease, then the narcotic for the narcotic's sake. Never fear that men who have practiced advertising will doubt mine!"

There was no complacency in George's voice. Only experience expressing truth, and its expression was enough to convince Ada. And she had no doubt that it would convince the owners, too.

The efficacy of "Priming the Pump" was one of the earliest economic lessons taught her generation and in a way, though George had not used those words, his Plan seemed to involve that. And George, out of his concern for his fellow men was willing to devote the Pismire millions and the Pismire genius to this priming!

But now, fully awake, Ada was also aware of the sacrifices this would entail . . . the Pismire fortune and, she thought, looking about, La Pismirada itself would be engulfed by The Plan. This thought got her at once from her bed without waiting for her coffee and orange juice, as if she must look quickly if she wanted to see La Pismirada before it had gone, as she supposed it must soon, to recompense those who endured.

So thinking, she hurriedly bathed, dressed, and went downstairs. She found George where she had expected to find him, in his suite of office, study and sun porch (which served also as a kind of informal dining room), surrounded by telephones, teletypes, dictaphones, typewriters, secretaries and young men out of the Los Angeles Eartheater offices. The hubbub of activity surrounding George was so great that Ada decided not to break in upon it. As she stood admiring the calm and easy manner in which he dominated the men and machines about him, Sam Pickthall, one of the Eartheater young men whom she knew slightly, came up to her.

"Good morning, Mrs. Pismire," he said enthusiastically. "This is a glorious morning for all of us, isn't it?"

Ada didn't think the prospect of parting with La Pismirada and eventually the entire Pismire fortune very glorious, in so far as she, personally, was concerned. Never the less she answered mildly, "How do you mean glorious, Mr. Pickthall?"

Sam Pickthall had so narrow a jaw and chin that Ada, whenever she saw him always found herself admiring the deft way in which his mouth and teeth had been worked into the small space left for them. Admiring once again the compactness of this arrangement she missed his next sentence.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Pickthall," she apologized, "I didn't hear you."

"It's the beginning of a new career for George Pismire!" Mr. Pickthall repeated. "A glorious new career, and a period of new hope for California!"

Ada would just as lief George had kept his old career. And though she loved her native state, her love was not great enough to make her relish parting with La Pismirada.

"George is a great philanthropist and patriot," she agreed. "Still, I must admit to a little selfishness myself. I can't help feeling sad at the thought of parting with all this." Ada indicated the house, the ranch, the hills beyond.

"Well, of course," Sam Pickthall admitted, "we aren't going to be able to exactly hide ten thousand people out here, big as La Pismirada is. But over beyond Spring Hill Ridge, where Patronville is to be located, the Patrons won't be very noticeable."

"I didn't mean lose it in that way," Ada explained, "I meant lose it altogether. You know George's Plan by now. 'Those who endure must be recompensed.' La Pismirada and all George has will be just a drop in the bucket for that."

Mr. Pickthall's thin jaw dropped a little. "Ada Pismire!" he exclaimed. "You didn't think George was underwriting this? That he, personally, was going to pay the Patrons?"

"I know he said it wouldn't be necessary, but I supposed that was just to comfort me."

"Why, you brave, noble, mistaken woman!"

"Brave?" Ada asked. "Mistaken?"

"Brave," said Sam Pickthall, "to be willing to let George go ahead with The Plan when you were so mistaken. Mistaken to think that The Pismire Plan"—this was the first time Ada remembered hearing The Plan called The "Pismire" Plan—"would cost George money. At first, certainly. But what new venture wouldn't? And after that," Mr. Pickthall enthusiastically snapped his fingers, "the gravy!"

"You mean George is going to make more money?"

"Certainly. What kind of an un-American venture did you take this to be, Mrs. Pismire?"

"I didn't think it was un-American," Ada said, "but I thought it was for the good of all mankind, too."

"Oh it is. Absolutely. But George is also a part of mankind isn't he?"

Ada had no thought of denying this. "Still, I scarcely see," she began. Mr. Pickthall silenced her with a wagging finger.

"One thing at a time, Mrs. Pismire. I can see that George didn't speak to you of The Equilibrium. Just at the minute I have the little job of lining up ten thousand Patrons or I'd explain it to you myself. Don't you worry for a second though! First the ten thousand, then R.A.P.S. and finally The Equilibrium! Now, the ten thousand."

Mr. Pickthall snapped his fingers again, reclosed his thin jaw, and hurried out into the sunny morning.

For the next fortnight Ada saw very little of George. He came to bed late. He arose early. He was encircled by Eartheater executives and secretaries. Cars sped between La Pismirada and Los Angeles. Messages flashed across the country. San Francisco was calling. Chicago was calling. New York was calling. From George himself Ada now heard nothing further concerning The Plan, but she did not misunderstand his silence. He no longer had time for words. He was occupied translating words into a firmer more enduring substance. He had planted a dream. He was busy reaping a reality.

The reality of the people (Ada still thought of them as "people," not yet as Patrons) who streamed down the highway past La Pismirada bound for Spring Hill Ridge and the fast growing Patronville; the reality of the great masses of packaged houses and Eartheater equipment moving in the same direction; the reality of the announcements Ada was beginning to see in the papers and hear over the radio. These announcements consisted of one sentence, "What's your R.A.P.S. rating?" (Later usage abbreviated the R.A.P.S. to R.A.P.) But only that. Nothing more. Only that sentence in the insistent block letters and the concerned voices. "What's your R.A.P.S. rating?" Until even Ada, who knew the meaning of the initials, began to be concerned about her own rating.

Commentators, before a word had been made public as to what an R.A.P. rating was, were already filling the air with their speculations. Ada heard one well-known news analyst assure his audience that, "It is no secret that the Dahl James" (Dahl James operated a large West Coast chain of semi-mechanized drug stores) "Rap Rating is the highest on the Coast."

At another time, in one of those secret and private letters to which George subscribed and which was written by a man specializing in industrial and political foresight, she read an interpretation of the initials. "It is reported in Washington," this man wrote his customers, "that R.A.P.S. stands for nothing less than, 'Revolution After Pismire Starts.' After Pismire starts what, has not yet been stated, but information originating close to George Pismire himself informs us that R.A.P.S. will turn present consumer practices upside down. Activities on Wall Street have slowed considerably in anticipation of the Pismire move. The Pismire money and energy, together with the Pismire reputation for large-scale activity, make certain that that move, whatever it is, will be important. Reports purporting to be 'in on the know' concerning Pismire activities are having some circulation. Disregard these. *They are all baseless.* No one now knows, *for certain* what George H. Pismire plans. But it is important. It is coming. We counsel, *Wait and See.*"

"Wait and See." While Ada, busy with her own work at La Pismirada, did not "wait," she could not avoid seeing and hearing much that went on about her. She was accustomed to that feeling of excitement and expectancy which always filled those working with her husband on a new enterprise. Nothing, however, had prepared her for the great surge of almost religious devotion and exultation which now enveloped La Pismirada. The Plan! The Plan! It was the last word she heard at night, the first in the morning. Those working on The Plan seemed to have access to enormous and ordinarily untapped sources of energy. The Eartheater young men (now beginning to be capped "Rapmen") worked twenty-four hours a day, snatched a bite to eat when and where they could, and slept, in so far as Ada could tell, not at all. In spite of this they continued in good health, and were gay, thoughtful companions on those rare occasions when Ada was successful in persuading one or more of them to sit down long enough to eat a complete meal.

While the staff at La Pismirada was competent and loyal, still there had been, during Ada's absence in the East, the usual slackening of effort which such an absence occasions and she had had her hands full upon her return setting things to rights. One afternoon more than two weeks later while she was busily rearranging and checking sheets in the linen room, Sam Pickthall, walking noiselessly, appeared at her side. Without a word he took the stack of sheets she held from her hands and placed them on the wrong shelf.

"That'll be all for this afternoon," he said.

At first Ada was inclined to be a little put out by this abrupt interruption, but Sam easily explained it.

"George wants me to bring you out to Patronville at once," he said. "The ten thousandth Patron arrived this morning and this afternoon George is to make his speech of welcome and dedication. He knew you wouldn't want to miss it."

George was right. It was an occasion Ada would not have missed for anything. Besides she had not yet seen Patronville, George having asked her to postpone her visit until the settlement was completed and the Patrons established. Now, the hour had come. Ada put on one of her flowery summer hats, for though it was already mid-October the excitements of The Plan had made her forgetful of the changing seasons, and accompanied Sam Pickthall to his car. Sam's car was as open to sun and sky as a chariot and Ada thus missed none of the day's pleasantness as Sam drove toward Patronville.

The new settlement was completely hidden until they reached the summit of Spring Hill Ridge—then, suddenly, there it was—flowing down the Ridge's far side, homes for ten thousand people! They were simple homes of the well-known "Mak-A-Mansion" packaged variety, but they were fresh and new that October afternoon and they sparkled in the clear air like banks of serried flowers against the tawny hillside. Ada was amazed both at the speed with which George had moved and the beauty he had achieved. Hearing her exclamation of delight Sam stopped his car on the summit so that she might have a few minutes of quiet enjoyment before being plunged into the midst of the Patrons and their celebration.

"It's really beautiful isn't it?" Ada asked. "And Patronville is much too dull a name for so lovely a place."

Sam Pickthall agreed. "I'm heading a movement to have it renamed Plamire—the first letters of Plan and the last of Pismire," he explained. "Though something even better may occur to us."

After a few minutes contemplation, Ada said, "I can't think how ten thousand people were so quickly persuaded to leave their homes and come here. It must have taken great eloquence on your part, Mr. Pickthall!"

Sam, who had been in charge of this part of the program made a gesture of modest denial. "Oh, I wouldn't say that, Mrs. Pismire. Your husband's plan has an irresistible appeal. Besides, you yourself have seen the people and know that with conditions as they are they have everything to gain and nothing to lose."

"Have they been told exactly what they're to do?"

"Only in general. We ourselves don't know exactly. That will depend upon where our R.A.P. responses are heaviest. But they do know that they're going to be well housed, have two or three hours of labor here at La Pismirada, and receive good pay for what formerly they themselves paid. It's that realization, Mrs. Pismire, that gives Patronville its air of joyousness. It's what they and the world have been waiting for.

Our environment had become so unendurable we simply couldn't take it much longer. The Pismire Plan furnishes us the needed incentive for further endurance. Funny, isn't it?" Sam Pickthall mused. "Two weeks ago no one had ever heard of The Pismire Plan. Now it seems so right, so inevitable it takes an effort to realize it hasn't always existed!"

Below them, as Sam Pickthall talked, Ada watched the Patrons, (Sam's constant use of the word had made it seem less strange to her.) going about their business of getting settled. Furniture vans were being emptied of household goods, water mains connected, shrubs set out, windows washed, bonfires of excelsior and wrappings lighted. But even as she watched Ada noted a decline in these activities. Patrons by twos and threes, singly and in family groups were beginning to move around a projecting spur of the Spring Hill Ridge and so out of sight. Ada called Sam's attention to this growing line of Patrons, all moving in the same direction, and asked him its meaning.

"They're on the way to the Amphitheater," Sam explained.

"Amphitheater!" exclaimed Ada. "So soon?"

"Oh it's just roughed in so far. There's a natural bowl there anyway and it wasn't any trick to enlarge it with a couple of Eartheaters and slap in some cement benches. That's where George is to speak, and I expect we'd better be joining the Patrons."

Ada was reluctant to leave. Seen from above, Patronville (later Plamire) had not only that enchantment which distance lends but the even greater enchantment of the miniature. Thinking about this, Ada said, "If a race of thumb-sized men and women ever turned up we might all of us become their willing slaves."

Sam Pickthall, uninterested in fantasy, had nothing to say to this. Fundamentally, Ada, also, was no dreamer, and presently she asked, "Is the Patron to keep all he earns in the rental service?"

"Ninety per cent," said Sam, "goes to the Patron. Perhaps an even higher per cent for those in the more onerous brackets."

"What happens to the other ten per cent?"

"Expenses of staffing, organization, the usual overhead," Sam replied, "will take about four per cent. The residue goes to Pismire, Inc."

The line of Patrons moving toward the amphitheater had no breaks in it now. Watching it, Ada began to have some idea as to just how many people ten thousand really were. How, she wondered, could so many be profitably employed for two or three hours a day even on a ranch as large as La Pismirada. Sam however pooh-poohed her fears that

George had perhaps overestimated the opportunities that La Pismirada offered for work.

"In the first place," he said, "the women and children are not going to work on the ranch. In the second place, no one will work more than two or three hours a day. In the third place—the projected dam alone will be able to make use of the labor of every man here for an indefinite period. And once the dam is in—" Sam Pickthall threw up his hands. "I don't know. Irrigation for all of La Pismirada, hydroponics! Well, your guess is as good as mine, Mrs. Pismire, but I should think a hundred thousand Patrons might settle here, finally."

Now from below, amplified by loud speakers, a man's voice announcing George's speech interrupted Sam's speculations.

"Let's not wait any longer," Ada urged, forgetting that it was she who had been reluctant to go. At Ada's word Sam sent his car quickly down the grade and into the heart of Patronville.

Alighting there, Ada saw that Sam had been absolutely right in his characterization of the Patrons. Ada was not young and in her lifetime she had seen many groups of people—people come together for many different purposes. She had seen the rollicking gaiety and excitement of a football crowd. She had seen throngs of people moving away from a theater after witnessing the satisfying performance of a noble and affecting play. During the war years she had observed the devout joy of masses of citizens assembled to celebrate a victory.

Nothing on these occasions was comparable to what she was now witnessing. The Patrons moving toward the amphitheater had the physical exuberance of football crowds, the psychical *élan* of those who have been aesthetically satisfied, and they had also that mingling of joy and sorrow which characterizes those who, in the celebration of victory, are unable to forget the fields upon which that victory was won.

And while the over-all atmosphere was one of calm happiness, what analysts have recently taken to calling "The Pismirian Placidity," the Patrons, like people everywhere, had their individual differences. The happiness of most was expressed quietly in gait, bearing, expression. But here and there in the moving line of Patrons a man or woman, becoming vocal in his exultation, shouted or sang. The single word, "Pismire" was heard more often than any other. An enthusiast, out of sight around the spur of Spring Hill would shout the word, "Pismire," and "Pismire," "Pismire," would sweep the moving throng, like a cresting wave, to break finally somewhere far back of Ada and Sam Pickthall.

One applecheeked oldster, dwelling apparently on the indignities of the past rather than the assurances of the future, periodically leaped high into the air (his age considered) shouting as he did so, "Worse than dogs, worse than dogs."

The Pismire corner stones varied in their appeal to the Patrons, one speaking to one man's condition, another to another's. By and large the older Patrons, those with protracted periods of endurance behind them, were drawn toward the Pismirian truths which most reflected what they themselves had suffered and from their lips Ada heard the bitter "Men fare worse than dogs," the melancholy "The people are not getting what they want."

The younger Patrons were more hopeful, less warped by contact with their environment and its constant indignities. They shouted—when they shouted—the two truths which looked toward the future and called for action. "No one is going to make a monkey out of me," and "Those who endure must be recompensed."

And from all, the young and old alike moving under the fine California sun toward the complete Pismirian revelation, that later rallying cry of Patrons the world over, "Recompense, Recompense," rang out with spine tingling freshness on that first October afternoon.

Sam Pickthall noticing the tears in Ada's eyes momentarily touched her hand with one of his long, thin fingers. "They've waited for so long," he explained gently.

Though they *had* waited a long time, some for almost the entire span of their lives, they were all quiet once they were seated in the amphitheater. Recompense Bowl (as it is now known) has been preserved in all of its original crudity and simplicity as a shrine, and many make pilgrimages to this cradle of Pismirism. It is not to be supposed, however, that even the most imaginative pilgrim is able to reconstruct in his mind, the circumstances of that founding speech. The rough cement benches. Yes. The westering sun. The small semicircular cement stage. Even that spray of farewell summer timidly placed by some young devotee on the outer edge of the stage. These, the imagination may call up before the inner eye of today's pilgrim. But however much he is able imaginatively to see, he can not feel what Ada and Sam Pickthall felt that day: the hush, the longing, the affirmation.

Ada never became accustomed to the manner in which anything which had to do with The Plan altered her husband's appearance. No one has ever asserted that George Pismire was other than a rather short (under five feet seven), somewhat pudgy and, in his late sixties, an almost bald man. True, he had always the pink and white coloring of a man who enjoys a good digestion and a good circulation. Still, there is no combination of colors less heroic than pink and white—and George Pismire walking out onto that crude cement platform on that historic October afternoon, short, pudgy, pink and white and semibald was heroic. As he spoke he became, in his own person, the past with its limitations and suffering. He became the future with its promise of surcease. He combined, in his own person, those who had endured, and those who need endure no longer without recompense.

Ada's intense emotion on this occasion made it impossible later for her to recall much of George's speech—though there was much, too, she was never to forget: the hush as George made his appearance; the sun at his back so that its rays seemed to make *him* their center; the great surf-like roar which filled the amphitheater when he had finished. These she never forgot; nor did she forget his opening and closing sentences. George Pismire's first words sent echoing across the foothills their trumpet call to a new life. "Patrons of the World, unite!" And his closing words, after The Pismire Plan had been fully outlined, quietly pronounced the doom of the old: "The Day of Recompense is at hand."

Though the Day of Recompense was at hand it had not yet actually arrived, and to say that George Pismire was completely without doubts or uncertainties as to the acceptance of The Plan, by those who alone could assure its success—those who must rent the Patrons—would be to oversimplify.

That The Plan was for the good of all, that it was inevitable, of these facts George Pismire was convinced. But he also knew history and, knowing it, knew that, from Galileo on down, history is little more than a record of the sufferings of those who have advocated the good and the inevitable before their fellow men have been able to recognize them as such. And while he continued to speak cheerfully and to bear himself with confidence, to the three or four of those closest to him he spoke candidly of his doubts.

One the eve of December twelfth, the Day of Recompense, he, with his wife and the three people who had been closest to him in his work on The Plan, Sam Pickthall, Amory Vance (who had been George's contact man with prospective Renters, as Sam Pickthall had been with the Patrons) and his secretary, Eloise Treadway, sat about a log fire in the great library at La Pismirada. There was a light, pleasant California rain falling and though a December evening in California is never cold, still it was the season for fires and the five took a seasonal pleasure in the scent and sound of the crackling eucalyptus logs.

Since this gathering is also memorialized in a Walther painting (called with typical Walther flatness, "On the Eve"), there is no need to dwell on its pictorial aspects. The three men, as Walther has painted them, were in dinner jackets; Ada Pismire wore a teal blue dinner dress and Eloise Treadway, straight from the R.A.P. offices, was still in gray street dress.

The fire crackled. Rain ran off the roof and splashed onto the stone work of the terrace. The French doors, which opened onto the terrace, creaked in the rising wind. George Pismire was first to put down his coffee cup.

"I've had the house phones disconnected," he said. "I thought we would all like—whatever tomorrow brings—to spend this last evening together, quietly."

Eloise Treadway, who had been George's personal secretary for over twenty years, regarded him with admiration. She had been with him during the entire day and she knew that there was for him, as for everyone else in the room, but one thought: what will the morrow bring? Still he, alone of those gathered about the fire, was relaxed and smiling; he alone, who carried the greatest responsibility. Ada, nervously, hunched one shoulder upward in order to sniff the Bouvardia corsage she wore; Sam Pickthall sat, as he often did, seemingly either trying to shrink his teeth or to stretch that part of his face which covered them; Amory Vance squinted moodily into the fire.

"It does me good on a night like this," said George stretching a hand toward the fire, "to think of the Patrons snugly housed over at Patronville, and able to look forward to the day when they need no longer endure fruitlessly."

Sam Pickthall, who was responsible for that snug housing, said rather complacently, and largely, Miss Treadway felt, for Amory Vance's benefit, "The Patrons are there, and snug enough, too. It remains to be seen how many Renters show up in the morning. And without Renters, the Patron's snugness won't last long."

The Renter response was still wholly conjectural. George Pismire, because he had felt it would be fairer for small and marginal Renters, had refused to accept any offers for Patrons prior to the Day of Recompense, December twelfth. And though everyone connected with The Plan anticipated, because of the tremendous press and radio response, because of the volume of mail which daily poured into the R.A.P. offices, and most of all, because of the intangible yet very real sense of change which was enveloping California from Yreka to Calexico, that the morning would find Renters clamoring for Patrons, yet until that hour arrived no one could be entirely free of anxiety. And most anxious, of course, was the man who would tomorrow morning have to shoulder the larger part of the blame should an inadequate number of Renters put in their appearance—Amory Vance.

Now, looking about the semicircle but letting his glance rest finally on Sam Pickthall, he said, "I can't think of a single stone we have left unturned."

"Is it possible," Sam asked him, "that we've turned too many stones?"

Though Sam said "we," he meant, of course, "you." And by his "too many stones," Miss Treadway supposed, he intended to suggest that Amory's advertising campaign had perhaps been so thorough as to bludgeon people into indifference rather than stimulate them into action.

Amory bristled up at once, but George Pismire quite aware of Sam's complacency—with ten thousand Patrons already at Patronville and ten thousand more clamoring to get in—and of Amory's uneasiness, his work being as yet unproved, gave Amory no chance to reply.

"Amory, as tomorrow will prove, I think, has acquitted himself magnificently," he said. "Housing the Patrons, building Patronville—that was an undertaking, I grant you, Pickthall, but the persuasion of the Patron—no," and George Pismire laughed with as much carefreeness as if his own and his fellow countrymen's future were not at stake, "no, Sam, the Patron was a ripe plum waiting to fall into your lap. Amory's work with the Renter has been a little more complex."

"My task," said Amory, somewhat mollified by this recognition, "has been to show the Renter that this is his last chance to preserve his own way of life—and that to do this he *must* change the Patron's feelings about it. Recompense is the only solution—R.A.P. the only machinery for achieving that solution! God knows," he declared, "that I would not want to assume responsibility for the typical Renter's thought processes—but I do believe, that in so far as he is able to put two and two together and get four, he will, with the material I have provided him, see that R.A.P. is the only way out for him."

Amory, out of his deep conviction and in the heat of the minute, got to his feet. He finished what he had to say standing, and emphasized his words by smartly smacking fist against palm. "Our environment—the world about us—*that* has been generations in building. It is a material thing and is not easily changed . . . but the attitude of the Patron . . . of those who endure . . . can be changed—*must* be changed if we want the world as we know it to continue."

For a second or two all thought that the sounds they had heard were made by Amory; though how either the slight movement of his chair as he had pushed it away from himself across the heavy carpet of the library, or the fleshy smacking together of his hands, could have resulted in a scraping, metallic noise, it is impossible to say.

Amory himself realized, of course, that he was not responsible for them and broke off what he was saying to listen. He turned right about so that he faced the French doors, and with eyes narrowed, and head cocked was quickly transformed from "man speaking" to "man listening." The rest followed Amory's example. Craning their heads about they tried to make those small slits of darkness, which were all of the night the Venetian blinds permitted to enter the room, reveal whatever it was they had heard. There were no further sounds of the kind which had interrupted Amory's speaking, but over and above the natural sounds of the night—the drip of rain and the long, raw gush of wind down the canyon—a very real sense of something waiting, of something biding its time beyond those closed doors was conveyed.

It is characteristic that George Pismire should have been the first to resolve this situation. Without a word he walked swiftly to the French doors and with a single sweeping motion flung them open to the night and the rain. For the four left about the fire, it was as if, comfortable in a box at the theater, they had seen the curtains part upon a vast mob scene. Though mob is not the right word. There is disorder in that word, force, unreason. And there was no disorder and no hint of force or unreason among those hundreds who, patiently waiting, filled the terrace, extended stream-like down its broad stone steps and fanning out occupied all the unplanted space among the windswept, rainsoaked exotics in the La Pismirada cactus garden.

All—those outside in the rain as well as the five warm and dry within—were startled. There was an almost perceptible backward movement in both groups as if the sudden revelation had been a physical thing, like a gust of wind, an impact which could not be faced without swaying.

Then, while the five on the inside were trying to account for those on the outside, to find some purpose which would explain their assembling, a man in a yellow slicker, with attached hood pulled up tightly about his face, left the crowd and stood in front of George. The pyramidical outline which his rain coat and hood gave him suggested that he was a sort of unit-man, of the kind statisticians and graph-makers use to represent the number of coal miners, say, unemployed at any given time.

This outline of a man, this unit-man addressed George very simply, and without preliminaries. "Mr. Pismire," he said, "it was not our intention to disturb you in any way. We understood quite clearly that no offers to rent Patrons would be received before tomorrow morning, December twelfth. However," and there in the wind and the rain a smile quite warm and personal, and with no suggestion in spite of his outline of anything statistical, suffused the unit-man's face, "nothing was said about not getting in line for the bidding, the night before."

As the meaning of this assemblage now became apparent and as doubts were extinguished all about the fire smiled back at the man in the yellow slicker—though smiling did not suffice as an expression of Amory Vance's feeling. He, still standing, took hold of the back of his chair as if to steady himself and in a voice which can only be described as reverent, murmured, "Renters, thank God, Renters!"

George Pismire and the unit-shaped man continued to gaze at each other, their relationship personal and unmarred by any such generalizations as those voiced by Amory Vance. To George Pismire the first Renter was still quite obviously a human being in need of help. And to the Renter himself George appeared, not as the originator of The Pismire Plan, but as a comrade with a solution.

There they stood. Oblivious of rain, of the waiting hundreds in the rain, or of the opened doors, and of those who beyond the door watched. They were sealed within that timeless minute when seeker and solution meet. Then the two spoke together as such men will always speak.

"I am the proprietor of a combination Drive-In Movie and Dry Cleaner," the prospective Renter in the yellow slicker said. "It is an original idea, scientific, time-saving and thoroughly tested for its psychological appeal. While the customer remains seated in his car, enjoying the movie which is playing across the silver screen in front of him, we pipe into his car a harmless pleasantly scented gas which renovates, cleans, and moth-proofs his clothing as he waits. If the customer wishes to have his suit, or her frock, pressed during this interval, we provide a sanitary, apron-type covering tastefully labelled DIDC (with alternate readings as you grasp—either Did See, or Drive In-Dry Clean) for his covering during the see-clean, as we like to call it, process.

"It's a new venture, scientific, as I've said, fast and time-saving. Still there has been no response. Or almost none. And a man of principle and energy can't abandon a thing like that simply because people don't take to it right off.

"It's my baby," the man in the yellow slicker continued, "I dreamed it up. The public perhaps needs a little education, needs to be given a little shove forward. They have a little time-lag, maybe, as regards some of these newer more imaginative, mechanical advances. And I for one stand ready to help them. And ultimately myself, too, I'm convinced. Mr. Pismire, I'd like the honor of being the first Renter to sign up under the R.A.P. system. Put me down for ten Patrons," he said proudly.

George Pismire's hand went out to the first Renter in a clasp which was obviously strong and reassuring; but though the handclasp was steady, his voice trembled somewhat as he replied. "My friend," he said, "it is for you, also, I have labored," and with his free hand he then beckoned the assembled Renters inside to a place of warmth about the La Pismirada fire.

That was December eleventh, the eve of the Day of Recompense. Five months later George Pismire stood on the terrace of La Pismirada waving to the largest consignment of Patrons yet engaged by a single Renter. They rolled by La Pismirada in the big yellow R.A.P. busses and though they knew, as well as George, that they were bound for no very pleasant assignment they were, because Recompense had changed their attitude, smiling and cheerful. George returned their gestures of greeting with his natural warmth, and with considerable sympathy, too, aware as he was of the four hours of discomfort they had ahead of them at a movie called, "Should These Two Have Loved?" It was a picture which the R.A.P. Picture Sampler, who saw such things in advance in order to determine fair rentals, had reported to George as being, "frankly, the worst experience of that kind I ever had."

George continued on the terrace for some time after the busses had disappeared from sight, and presently the beauty of the morning succeeded in taking his mind off the assignment this particular group of Patrons had drawn. Overhead small islands of mist, as they began to feel the full force of the sun, were breaking up. Meadow larks called from the near-by fields. Butterflies drifted through the silky, windless air unable, in the midst of so great a choice of color and perfume, to come to any decision about a resting place. As George harkened, in his sensitive manner, to bird song and followed the butterfly drift, there came finally to his mind a word he had not, up to that minute, permitted himself to use. That word was, success.

Success! George Pismire felt himself to be the last man in the world to succumb to an easy optimism, yet surely The Pismire Plan might now be so designated! Twenty thousand Patrons at Patronville (called, as Pickthall had foreseen, Plamire). The dam nearing completion. Permanent dwellings replacing the Mak-A-Mansion edifices. New Patronvilles springing up all over Southern California. The demand for Patrons greatly exceeding the supply. Hope and enterprise in Southern California while upon the rest of the nation the Big Pinch tightened its merciless hold. Yes, success was surely the word!

During the past week alone two events, one anticipated, one not, had greatly heartened him. He had been completely surprised by the visit of a Washington representative, sent out to determine his response to projected government subsidies for Renters. It was felt in Washington, this representative said, that it would be far more logical for government moneys to flow into California through channels already established by The Pismire Plan than for the government to attempt to set up new enterprises for its disbursement.

"During the last depression," this representative reminded George, "there was considerable criticism of the establishment of new enterprises as you may recall."

George did recall, and while the logic of the government's position was irrefutable, still he felt called upon to remind the gentleman from Washington that the Renters did not need subsidies. "The Big Pinch," he said, "has been deflected from California. The wheels of industry, geared to a new purpose and lubricated by R.A.P., are turning in California. Fast," he added, recalling the Patron-filled busses which daily rolled past La Pismirada, "very fast, indeed."

"We know that," the Washington man had replied with unconcealed admiration. "It (and you, if I may say so) are the talk of the capital. Still, while The Pismire Plan is emotionally so satisfying, while it reconciles our people to the American way of life as nothing else has done, the time must come when the Renter, however much R.A.P. now promotes his economic health, will not have the money to avail himself of the services which R.A.P. offers. Anticipating that time, and considering the very real help you could render your country . . . and the administration . . . would you be adverse to government moneys flowing into Southern California through these channels, already established by you?"

In any matter involving the good of his country, George Pismire was the last man to be uncooperative. He was quite aware even at that time, however, that there would never be any occasion for government subsidies to the Renters. Earlier in the week, four days in fact before the Washington representative had arrived at La Pismirada, the first indications that the anticipated period of Equilibrium was approaching had begun to make their appearance.

George had been in his office listening to one of the daily radio reports of Rap Ratings when Sam Pickthall, breathless with excitement had rushed in to him.

"It's come! It's come!" Sam had stuttered. "The first three. One right after the other. Like clock work. What a morning!"

So vast, already, were the ramifications of The Pismire Plan that it was impossible for George to keep constantly in mind all of its ten thousand expanding and fluctuating details. Now, he did not at once follow Sam.

"The first three?" he asked. "The first three what?"

"Equilibrists," Sam fairly shouted. "Equilibrists."

"Is it possible?" George had asked, feeling that bewildered unbelief which fulfillment brings to those who have desired most ardently. "Is it possible?" Then, somewhat recovered he had asked, "How, Sam? Where?"

Sam, bursting with the importance of his news, needed no encouragement to impart it.

"Exactly as you had foreseen," he answered. "Quite simply, quite naturally. I was sitting in my office when the first was announced, one of our pioneer Renters, a fellow by the name of Rosepaugh. I supposed that he wanted to see me on some rather routine R.A.P. matter. An order for more Patrons. A Rent payment. A Rent adjustment. Something of that sort. Though I admit that I should have gathered from his manner that something more unusual was afoot. He was diffident, at first, naturally. A little self-conscious. A man doesn't make these shifts every day in his life. Finally, I put him at his ease, then. . . ."

Here George interrupted Sam, and with every right. For certainly he it was who had earned the privilege of saying the words which would announce the advent of Equilibrium. "Then," George continued, "this Renter said, 'I should like to be enrolled as a part time Patron.'"

Sam looked at George with admiration. "That's right. Mornings. He's the proprietor of the 'Star-Lite Swimming Service.' You know. Luminous bathing suits for night swimming. His business keeps him on the job evenings; and he's been doing very well, too. Has an R.A.P. rating of plus twenty-five. In fact, he has done so well that he's now running a little short of funds, is a little hard pushed to continue the R.A.P. service. Being a serious, sensitive fellow he can't bear the idea of a declining R.A.P. rate. Morning work as a Patron would solve everything for him."

Although Sam's report was matter-of-fact, neither he nor George were unaware of its tremendous import.

"You took him on, of course?" George asked.

"Certainly," Sam said. "Signed him up at once."

"Excellent," George commended him, "excellent! Exactly what I would have done."

There was now a little pause in the conversation—as if the two men would thoroughly view this landmark in Pismirism before passing on to another. Sam was first to break the silence.

"The next two were Patrons!"

"Patrons!" A man with less dignity than George Pismire might here have whistled, leaped high into the air, clapped Sam Pickthall on the back. George only repeated once again, though with intense feeling, "Patrons!"

Sam nodded. "You wouldn't know them, of course. But these two have had a lot of assignments recently in the high rent brackets. Radio auditors, users of masculine perfumes. That sort of thing. And they've saved considerable money. They wanted their Cancellation Slips so they could set up a Self-Shave Barber Shop."

"Self-Shave?" George asked. "How's that?"

"Same principle as the old chicken-pickers," Sam explained. "The face is inserted into a face-shaped aperture and the whiskers are simply lifted off and out by the combined action of rubber rollers and vacuum suction. No attendant needed except a cashier."

"Like a chicken," George repeated musingly. "Doesn't it endanger eyebrows, eye lashes and the like?"

"Not often, not if a man keeps his wits about him," Sam said. "Now and then a careless fellow gets relieved of a part of his moustache or burnsides. But that's the exception not the rule."

Without hesitation George said, "Give them their Cancellation Slips! They'll provide us with one of our most consistent openings for Patrons."

"I've already done so," Sam said proudly. "I was so sure of your reaction." Then rather for the pleasure he took in ruminating upon the morning's happenings than out of any need for corroboration, he continued, "This is absolutely it, don't you think? Nothing happen-chance?"

"Absolutely," George agreed. "This is it. This is the beginning of Equilibrium."

Equilibrium was not a state, however, he had felt called upon to mention to his Washington visitor. Nevertheless, it was the advent of Equilibrium, even more than the convoy of busses which had just passed La Pismirada which caused him, lingering in the May sunshine, to repeat the word, "success." He had never doubted that ultimately The Plan would prevail. Yet even the greatest faith finds the moment of fulfillment glorious and a towhee, hopping about the terrace in the semidomesticated manner of its kind, was frightened away by the force with which George Pismire once again exclaimed, "Success!"

Administrating The Pismire Plan gave its author scant time for any pleasures outside the framework of The Plan itself. Now, with a final inhalation of the soft May air and a final look about him at the glories of the La Pismirada gardens, George Pismire walked resolutely back into his office. Most of the paper work connected with The Plan went through the offices of Amory Vance and Sam Pickthall. Still there were details of a nature impossible to delegate and with these George Pismire busied himself until one-thirty. Then Ada, as was her custom, brought his lunch in to him.

"Just five minutes, dear," George said as Ada urged him to eat his omelet before it became cold. Five minutes later, exactly (in small things as in large, George was faithful), he turned away from his work and impaled upon his fork a brown crusty mouthful of Ada's omelet.

It was a mouthful fate never permitted him to swallow. Before he had lifted his fork from his plate he was being called over the private line connecting his and Amory Vance's offices with too insistent a clangor to ignore.

Amory's voice, in answer to George's hello, seemed very near hysteria—whether from fear, rage, shock, George could not tell.

"More slowly, Amory," George urged, "more slowly. I can't understand. I can't follow."

Slowness, together with intelligibility either in content or delivery seemed exactly what Amory could not manage.

"George," he said, "George, I can't grasp it. It's incredible. You'll never be able to believe it."

This seemed a reasonable statement in view of the fact that Amory seemed incapable of bringing himself to mention "it" at all, except ecliptically.

"They did it, George," he kept repeating, "they did it. In spite of everything anyone could do, or say. Ruined, ruined! Or practically. Upset Equilibrium. Forgot Recompense. Forgot you, George. Ruined the place."

"Did what?" George asked, utterly confused and beginning to feel also some impatience. "Ruined what?"

Amory's splutterings had continued to be so unconnected and unintelligible that George finally said, "Amory, whatever has happened—it can wait for its telling until you get here. How long will that take you?"

Amory had answered, in so far as George was able to make out, "twenty minutes." Replacing the phone George once again picked up his fork but before he was able to convey the bite of omelet (now cold) which it still held to his mouth, there was such a confused and disturbing burst of sound from the courtyard that he put fork and omelet down and walked to a window. There he saw the last of the busses to which he had so recently bid Godspeed come, with screeching tires, to a sudden and shuddering stop. Behind this last of the busses, but behind by inches, there followed a convertible coupé. Its driver, ignoring the indicated spaces for parking in the courtyard, did not pause until his car's bumper was flush with the first step of the terrace. Then with a suppleness amazing in a man of his bulk he shot over the door of his car and up the terrace steps, shouting as he came, "Pismire, Pismire! I want to see George H. Pismire."

With sadness for his abandoned lunch rather than anger at this incivility, for tolerance was one of his chief characteristics, George Pismire once more walked out into the May sunshine, the sunshine now of early afternoon.

"Whom have I the honor of addressing?" he asked courteously of the coupé's driver who had given over shouting for the even noisier activity of using the massive, hand-wrought La Pismirada knocker like a pile driver.

George had stepped out onto the terrace from a side door, and his unexpected appearance, together with his courteous tone, startled his irate caller into a temporary silence and a temporary civility. "I am Leo B. Summit, manager of the Four Feature Fair View, Southern California's finest motion picture theater," he announced.

George had heard not only of Leo. B. Summit, but also of Summit's Four Feature Fair View. The Four Feature Fair View had a cement wall where there were preserved the imprints of Hollywood's most famous lips. Here, at any hour and in any weather, might be seen devotees of the drama gazing and, this was not uncommon, taking what satisfaction there is to be had from lips, cement and unresponsive to be sure, but still, famous. Indeed, so common was this practice, that, except for the constant attention of a staff of repair men especially trained for the work, the lips of the more popular stars would, through constant osculatory erosion, have worn, not only thin, but off.

Mr. Summit, who was responsible for this wall, was a dark, broad, heavily muscled man. At this moment he so glistened, either because of heat or exertion or both, with a kind of oily film that George was of the opinion that a lighted match tossed in his direction would send Mr. Summit up in a quick short burst of flame and smoke.

Saying nothing of this, however, George answered Mr. Summit's announcement with a simple statement of his own name.

"If you are looking for George H. Pismire, Mr. Summit, I am he."

"You are he?" repeated Mr. Summit as if he doubted it.

"I am," said George. "What can I do for you?"

This started Mr. Summit to bellowing again. "Do for me," he bellowed, emphasizing the "for." "Do for me? You have already done for me, Pismire. What you had better start asking yourself now, Pismire, is what you can un-do for me. What you can un-do and re-do. You and your Rap men, Pismire, have done plenty for me for one day."

While these angry words were being spoken by Leo B. Summit, Patrons from the R.A.P. busses had been quietly alighting and now filled the courtyard. Mr. Summit, in his rage, seemed unaware of them and continued to address himself in his uncivil and ranting fashion to George.

"I pay you good money, Pismire, for your R.A.P. services. And what do I get in return? I'll tell you what I get" (for though Mr. Summit had addressed his question to George, he had not, it was obvious, the slightest intention of giving him any opportunity to answer). "I get a ruined theater! I get seats yanked up. I get objects thrown at the screen. I get vulgar sounds. Catcalls. Remarks. Words penciled on my wall. I get what cash customers I have—oh, I have some all right," he declared defiantly, though no one had contradicted him, "I get my cash customers scared out of their wits. And for this I pay? Think again, Pismire. Think again. For this you pay!"

George, for all the poor chronology, shaky coherence and utter lack of objectivity in Mr. Summit's report, began to understand what had happened.

"Was the picture showing at the Four Feature Fair Way, Mr. Summit, by any chance called 'Should These Two Have Loved?' "

"It was not only called, 'Should These Two Have Loved,' " Mr. Summit replied, "It was, 'Should These Two Have Loved,' that immortal, moving and technicolored masterpiece depicting the struggle of a great violinist in deciding between his love and his art. Does the artist, who is still a man, not have the right to stoop from his pinnacle to gather for himself a few crumbs of love? 'Should These Two Have Loved,' so magnificent in the sweep of its elemental emotion, so glorious in the surge of its unleashed passions! Yet so tender. So simple. So human. So real."

One of the Patrons, from the number now clustered about George Pismire and Leo B. Summit, added in a mild quiet voice to Mr. Summit's list, the words, "So unenjoyable."

Mr. Summit turned upon the Patron with scorn. "Enjoyable, Mr. Patron. Enjoyable! Let us please stick to the subject. If the thing had been enjoyable, why in God's name would I have had you there in the first place?"

Mr. Summit's logic silenced the mild-mannered Patron who had introduced the unfortunate words, but it had quite the opposite effect upon his numerous fellow Patrons; and they, now that Mr. Summit faced them, began loudly, angrily and simultaneously to address him.

"Should have torn your damned place down!"

"There are some things money can't buy!"

"Endurance is one thing, torture another!"

"Cruel and unusual punishment! The Constitution forbids it!"

"There are some things a man's got no right to ask a fellow human being to endure!"

Finally, the strong carrying voice of a middle-aged male Patron prevailed above the chorus of his comrades and he recounted in some detail and as a justification of their acts, the indignities they had suffered.

"First the violin," he concluded, "then the woman. Violin—woman.

Violin—woman. See-saw. See-saw. Will he?—Won't he? Will he?—Won't he? until I tell you a man's stomach turns, his gorge rises and finally. . . ." Here, the Patron's memory of what he had so recently suffered overwhelmed him, and he made a menacing gesture in Mr. Summit's direction.

George Pismire, by stepping at once between Leo B. Summit and the enraged Patron prevented any violence and fortunately just at this juncture Amory Vance arrived. Taking advantage of Amory's arrival and of Mr. Summit's obvious uneasiness in the face of the growing anger of the assembled Patrons, George suggested that the two of them return to the Fair View and there make an estimate of the damage the place had suffered. To this, Mr. Summit, somewhat mollified by George's admission of Patron responsibility and anxious for an excuse to get beyond the reach of the Patrons themselves, agreed. Amory, too distracted and upset to think for himself did not for a minute question George, but climbed at once into Mr. Summit's light blue convertible.

No sooner, however, had Leo B. Summit driven his convertible out of the courtyard at La Pismirada than there was a tremendous change in the Patrons who stood there facing George. A minute before they had been filled with anger, defiance, contempt. Now, George watching them, saw quite other emotions mirrored in their faces. He saw remorse, and sorrow; he saw uneasiness about their actions at the Four Feature Fair View.

Since he was no egoist he did not see what was also there: the great respect and liking they had for George H. Pismire, the man. The man who had rescued them from Endurance without Recompense, who had saved them from the Big Pinch. The first man to say, "The people are not getting what they want," and "Men fare worse than dogs." And feeling all this (which George did not see) they wondered, with sinking hearts if, in one wild and unpremeditated outburst, they had endangered all they had gained under The Pismire Plan.

During the time they stood facing each other—Patrons, who had profited and Pismire, who had planned, each with his own thoughts, George, no less than the Patrons, filled with doubts, wondering if the success which, short hours before, had seemed so certain was now to be snatched from him—a young man had been making his way toward George. Since both George and the Patrons were, after the strong feelings of the past minutes, sunk into a kind of brooding apathy, scant attention was paid by either to the progress of the young man.

"Will you let me through here, please?" he would ask, or "May I pass, please," and the Patrons made way for him automatically and with scarcely a glance in his direction, let alone at him.

He arrived finally at a position directly in front of, and slightly below (since George still stood on the terrace steps) George Pismire, and here in a firm, clear voice he addressed George.

"Mr. Pismire," he said.

George Pismire looked down. Later, he was frequently to declare that before Enos Prosper (for that was the young man's name) had spoken another word he was aware that a person of utmost importance to Pismirism had come upon the scene.

Not that there was anything in Enos Prosper's appearance to indicate that his contribution to The Pismire Plan would rank second only to George's. He was unlike Sam Pickthall and Amory Vance (highest in the R.A.P. hierarchy until his own arrival) in this. While neither Pickthall nor Vance were what could be called handsome men, they were both men, in appearance, of considerable distinction and importance. They looked, in a word, like individuals.

There was on the other hand some indeterminate, un-individualized quality about Enos Prosper, as if he were not very specifically separated from the rest of mankind. Physically he was specific and solid enough, certainly, weighing not under a hundred and eighty-five pounds and being at least five feet, ten inches tall. His jaw was square, his shoulders broad, his stance unequivocal. In spite of this Enos Prosper was somehow fluid, composite. You felt as if within the blurred boundaries of his personality there might lurk thousands of his fellow Patrons and that by some process of physical osmosis he might be able to absorb thousands more.

Now (it was past three o'clock in the afternoon), his tone as he spoke once again to George was very clear and engaging.

"Mr. Pismire."

George, who in looking at the young man had forgotten to speak, now spoke.

"Yes?" he said.

"The Pismire Plan," said Enos Prosper, with no beating about the bush, "while right in principle, is wrong in application."

At these words there arose from Prosper's fellow Patrons an angry buzzing. They had now had time to reflect not only upon their enormous gains under The Pismire Plan, but upon their losses, should their actions at the Four Feature Fair View be held against them. And these reflections convinced them that it was a very poor time for a Patron to point out flaws in The Plan. Flaws there might be, but their life under The Plan was so much better than any other they had known that they would be willing in the future (they felt sure) to endure, for its sake, even more painful experiences than, "Should These Two Have Loved?"

"Why hell," said one Patron, summing up the matter for all of them. "We used to have to pay for such things! Now they pay us!"

But George silenced the Patrons. He had no foolish personal vanity which criticism of The Plan could wound. He was eager for truth. And he knew that the Patrons, in spite of their present resolution, would, if faced again with a duplication of "Should These Two Have Loved," react again as they had done.

He held his hand aloft until all their angry murmuring and buzzing ceased. Then he turned to Enos Prosper. "In what manner," he asked, "is The Pismire Plan wrong in its application?"

As young Prosper started to speak George beckoned him to come up the terrace a step or two nearer, and it was from this slight elevation that he addressed his words to George—and to his fellow Patrons. "The Pismire Plan," he said, "does not take into consideration the particular aptitudes of the individual Patron."

George thought this over for scarcely a second. "It does not," he agreed.

"It sends out," continued young Prosper, "to instance a single example, a Patron with great auditory resistance on a project requiring, shall we say, great digestive resistance. Or vice versa."

"Explain, please," George said.

"Gladly," replied Enos. "Say we have a Patron equipped by nature for rental to a Fish Grotto, or even a Chili Parlor. Is he, under The Pismire Plan as it is now administered, given any opportunity to exercise these natural gifts?"

There was a dramatic pause as these truths so obvious, once they were spoken, entered the minds of his listeners.

"No," Enos Prosper continued, "not at all. Ten to one this gifted man, this man with a real contribution to make to Pismirism, if he and his talents were properly understood, is sent out on some radio or lecture mission, where not only is he unable to exercise his gift, but where, because of his sensitive ear, the sounds he hears are complete torture."

From all of the Patrons there came immediate sounds and gestures of assent. "That's true," they murmured, "Happens all the time," "Funny we hadn't thought of it."

"And the Patron with the well-cushioned . . . one might even say calloused, ear . . . the Patron with the undeveloped auditory sense, the one who would take no harm from an entire evening of bread jingles, soap calls and constipation quizzes—where is he?"

"He," said George, his trigger-quick insight making the situation at once clear to him, "is eating cub steaks at Hobart's Lion Farm."

"Exactly," said Enos Prosper, "exactly."

"And I will tell you how to correct this situation," Enos, after a dramatic pause, told his listeners. "Through Aptitude Testing! Yes, Aptitude Testing," he repeated, as a long ripple of understanding and enthusiasm swept his fellow Patrons.

During the time Enos had been speaking the number of Patrons listening had greatly increased, had indeed doubled and trebled. As word of the incident at the Four Feature Fair View got out relatives and friends of those involved had streamed across the hills which separated Plamire from La Pismirada. Now they stood shoulder to shoulder with their comrades in the La Pismirada courtyard anxious, concerned, trying to gather from Enos Prosper's words an indication of the extent to which brother, husband or father was held to be culpable in the affair.

They had been picturing to themselves, since news of the incident first came to them, what their life would be like once more outside R.A.P.—should disciplinary action exclude them from it. Their trouble was that they could imagine that life all too well. They had lived it all too recently; and accustomed now to a reasonable self-respecting, self-supporting life, they were sickened by any thought of returning to the old way. Endurance without Recompense seemed, now that they had experienced a better way of life, shameful. It seemed a backward step. As if cavemen, having emerged from their dark gloomy holes into substantial, sunny shelters above earth, should be faced with the prospect of going, once again, underground.

Filled as they had been with these anxious forebodings, the Patrons, gathering from Prosper's words that some excuses for the Fair View incident were being advanced, broke into a sort of muffled, unorganized cheering.

It was Prosper himself who silenced them. "No, no!" he called out. "No, no! It is not so simple as that, my dear fellow Patrons. Aptitude Testing is the aswer, yes. It will send a Patron to that Renter who can best use his gifts. Yes. But we have a great job ahead of us in determining gifts. Testing for even simple aptitudes is a very complex business. And as we all know there are Renters with commissions which require aptitudes, existing, without a doubt, but certainly very difficult to discover."

Prosper then went on to illustrate this fact by listing some of these commissions. Best remembered is his clear exposition of the difficulties involved in determining which Patrons had the greatest natural aptitude for interment in Southern California's famous "Isle of the Departed" cemetery.

This was (and still is) one of the most widely known show places in Los Angeles County. The "Isle of the Departed" was, in the first place, no more than a small knoll in a large barley field. At untold cost and effort—considering the scarcity of water in Southern California—this little knoll had been surrounded by a lagoon of water and so transformed into an "isle." True, the water in the lagoon (which, while it flowed around the "Isle of the Departed" was called the "River of Memories") was ultimately piped off for use in irrigating the L. A. Sewage Disposal Farm. Thus, to some extent, first costs were covered. But even so the project was a very costly one and I.O.D., Inc. (Isle of the Departed, Incorporated) was probably fully justified in estimating their costs for publicity purposes at a billion dollars.

The purpose of I.O.D., Inc., however, was not primarily commercial but spiritual: their aim was to make death (though they did not permit the use of this word) a beautiful experience for all. And while one cannot (obviously) speak for those primarily concerned in the I.O.D., Inc. ceremonies, one can say they were, for those involved in a secondary way, unusually rich and satisfying. To understand this one must understand first of all the importance of water in Southern California. Since water is here so scarce, it is quite likely that only those living in semiarid countries can appreciate the deep feeling a Southern Californian has for it. A Southern Californian watering his lawn in the twilight does so with much the same emotion which animates a religious man while taking Communion. He is participating in a mystery. The liquid stream which falls onto his grass plot and is elsewhere so taken for granted, is to him a true symbol of life and of death overcome.

Hence, the bereaved in Southern California feel that the sincerest tribute which can be paid to a departed loved one is to inter him near water. As in life the survival and happiness of the loved one depended upon irrigation, so in death, it is felt, the two should not be separated. Elsewhere, if they like, let the loved one be laid down for his eternal sleep in some semiarid acreage. But in Southern California it is not thought fitting that a dry plot of land which the departed would have considered unsuitable even for a subdivision, should serve as his eternal resting place. So, "Isle of the Departed," by virtue of its location within the purling confines of the "River of Memories," appeals strongly to the bereaved as an ideal "final home." And many Southern California residents, without the excuse of loved ones interred there, come from great distances in the summertime simply for the novelty of viewing, at that season, flowing water.

I.O.D., Inc. does not base its appeal, however, wholly upon the presence of running water. They have worked out, with the help of some C.S.C.'s, most eminent scholars in the fields of ancient myth and ritual, a ceremony well suited to the occasion.

This ceremony begins with the placing of the (not coffin—I.O.D., Inc. does not permit the use of this word) "Voyage Box" containing the loved one's remains on a gondola, beautifully draped in white parachute silk. From the gondola there trail into the "River of Memories" strands of intertwined flowers and vines, and the gondola itself is poled by two I.O.D. employees, richly clothed in Adrian-designed Venetian costumes. The "Voyage Box," it may be of any color save brown, black or gray, is covered with stickers and labels simulating those put on the trunks of merely temporal travelers, these stickers carrying, of course, quite other phrases than those used by hotels, inns, resorts and the like.

As this gondola laden with the "Voyage Box" puts out into the "River of Memories," a twelve-piece string orchestra plays "Aloha Oe" (Farewell to Thee), and the bereaved toss still other flowers, provided by I.O.D., Inc. onto water, gondola and "Voyage Box" itself. After the gondola with its precious burden is some yards down stream, the bereaved step into a cortège of power launches (the orchestra occupies the final launch) and so once, twice or thrice, depending upon the class of interment being enjoyed by the loved one, circle the "Isle of the Departed."

Beautiful and suitable as this whole set-up seemed to I.O.D., Inc., and great as its appeal has been to living Southern Californians, it too often failed to appeal to the Southern Californian stricken by his final sickness. This person, in health so geographically self-conscious, in sickness often lost his pride of place, sloughed off his joy in irrigation and reverted to that primitive state in which a dry place to sleep, whether temporarily or eternally, is much prized. I.O.D., Inc., had to face the fact that the very same person who in the pride of his youth and health had whiled away many a pleasant Sunday afternoon admiring the "River of Memories" desired, as the shadows crept about him, to be laid away "in a nice dry spot."

I.O.D., Inc. had discovered also that the only way they could counteract this tendency was to sell interment sites to the young and healthy, for their subsequent use. With these sites awaiting and paid for, their owners' prattlings, as their final hour approached, about "a nice dry spot," were less likely to be heeded by those anticipating bereavement.

R.A.P. was involved in this situation, as Enos Prosper reminded his listeners, by reason of the fact that I.O.D., Inc. was anxious to sign up a number of Patrons in the upper age brackets as prospective interees. There had been a notable falling off in I.O.D. Departures during the past year and the tone of the entire establishment would be freshened and stimulated, I.O.D. was convinced, if during the next few months the number of flower-strewn "Voyage Boxes" setting off down the "River of Memories" could be materially increased. But not only did I.O.D., Inc. want Patrons in the upper age brackets, they needed Patrons who would not at the last minute "revert."

"Now," Enos Prosper continued, and, because of the familiarity of his fellow Patrons with I.O.D., Inc., he had been able to present their case in fewer words than those used here, "the question of aptitudes in a situation of this kind is very complex, indeed. Not only are we faced with the need of determining a Patron's aptitude for serving as an interee in a moist spot—we must also determine the degree of correlation between that aptitude as expressed now and," Enos concluded delicately—"as expressed—terminally."

Shadows were lengthening across the great courtyard at La Pismirada. The sun, westering, touched a dove's wing, dropping valleyward from its home in the deep canyons, to new lusters. Cicadas took up their day-end strumming. Coolness came with the dusk. Over at Plamire an evening bell tolled.

The big R.A.P. busses, homeward bound with their cargoes of weary Patrons, paused long enough at La Pismirada to determine the cause of the unusual gathering. Discovering what was afoot, more and more Patrons joined their fellows in the courtyard until finally the courtyard would not hold all those who desired to hear Enos Prosper's words. The assemblage overflowed the courtyard entirely, washed across the La Pismirada-Plamire road upon which the courtyard opened, and mounted, at last, the gentle rise of the slope upon the road's further side. Even to this greatly increased and widely dispersed audience Enos had no trouble in making himself heard. His voice naturally plangent, and carrying, was deepened and enriched now by the import of his message.

He was detailed and explicit in his explanation of the place of Aptitude Testing within The Pismire Plan. For he, as well as George Pismire, considered it, not so much a preventative of episodes like that of the Four Feature Fair View, as an opportunity for each Patron to express, within the Pismirian framework, his own, singular gifts.

The Pismirian goal became that afternoon not simply the rather negative (as we can now see) "No Endurance Without Compensation," but the positive, forward looking, "Compensation For Endurance in Your Own Field! Compensation for Endurance Where You Are Best Fitted to Endure! Creative, Compensated Endurance!"

In spite of, or perhaps because of Enos' great clarity, there were numerous questions from the Patrons concerning Testing and to these questions he gave thoughtful, exact answers. How pleasant in the increasing darkness was the sound of their voices! How refreshing in the dusk the back and forth of interrogation and answer! How seemly beneath the California stars the growth of wisdom!

For while Enos had been speaking the stars had come out and the constellations, increasing in incandescence as earth's shadows deepened, had assumed their well-known configurations. This drama overhead was lost on the Patrons, however; they had eyes only for Prosper or as much of him as they were able, in the increasing darkness, to make out. As he continued to speak some of the younger Patrons, with whispered injunctions to those nearest, not to "miss a word" and to "remember all for me," sped back across the rolling hills to Plamire to gather up the articles of food required for a barbecue in the California style. For in their mounting joy it had become clear to all that this was a day which could not end without suitable celebration: without the sharing of bread and meat, the clasping of hands, the lifting of voices together in song.

The cheerful resonance of handclapping which followed Enos Prosper's speech was succeeded by another sound: the deep, full-throated cries of "Pismire, Pismire." The Patrons, while they did not undervalue Aptitude Testing, recognized it for what it was: no more (and no less) than a window with a view opening outward from the glorious edifice of Pismirism. And it was "Pismire, Pismire," they called, while canyon, hill and grove gave back the cry whose origin was the heart.

The words George Pismire spoke were few, but so well chosen that his listeners were more content with his few than with another's many. "Now my friends," he concluded, "the barbecue pits are glowing and the roasting meats invite us with their savory aromas. The coffee cauldrons are bubbling and from the pierced jackets of the potatoes the steam flies upward. Let us, who have had our spirits refreshed, now sit in fellowship together and refresh the physical man."

With George Pismire leading the way the Patrons then placed themselves about the improvised trestle tables, well-covered with inviting baskets of bread, bowls of crisp salads and great jugs of red and white wine. And there, when the eating was finished, a remarkable thing happened. While the coals in the barbecue pits still winked their red eyes at the unregarding stars and the companionable wine still warmed the veins of men bound together by something warmer than wine and stronger than companionship, a ballad was born!

Prior to Pismirism the ballad had died out of our lives. It is an expression of the group: of the many able, as the result of some extraordinary emotional fusion, to think and feel as one. And when, before Pismirism, were we ever as a group so sufficiently united or transported as to be capable of composition? The answer is, of course, never. But that May night at La Pismirada! Then there was unity! Then there was transport! Together the danger which threatened The Plan had been faced. Together the solution of Testing had been accepted. Together a future in which one might Endure according to his Gifts and be Recompensed according to his Rights was assured. Then composition was spontaneous and singing more natural than speech!

There in the spacious California night first one voice, then another was raised. Men's voices alternated with those of women; the voice of youth with that of age; the voice of the trained vocalist with that of the merest tyro. Since then, this song has circled the globe, has been heard in every country and sung in every tongue. It is the song always sung on Aptitude Day; and on that day older Pismirians are wont to greet each other with, "Good aptitude," instead of "Good morning," "How's your Aptitude, this morning?" instead of "How's your health?" and even, if of a jocose turn of mind, with "What's testing?" Because of this a good many younger Pismirians, who growing up under The Plan take it for granted and know nothing of its history, have the hazy notion that Aptitude Day celebrates either the first singing of this song, the inauguration of Aptitude Testing, or possibly both.

This notion, natural as it may be, is far from correct. Aptitude Day celebrates an event of quite another character; an event of an importance not to be measured on the same scale as these others. Not to be measured even on the same scale as George Pismire's original conception of The Plan. George himself, with his gift for gnomic statement, put this matter as well as may be when he said, "Pismire made a Plan, Prosper made a Test, but only God can make a gene." That is about the size of it. Aptitude Day celebrates Providence and the Providential gene.

On that early fall day George Pismire was walking up and down amidst the rich profusion of the La Pismirada dahlias, enjoying them and the mid-afternoon sun. Miss Treadway, from George's office, watched the delicacy with which he now and then touched one of those amazing bursts of bloom. Watching him she only half caught the words which came tumbling across the hills from the A.R.S. laboratories. Pressing the phone more closely to her ear she asked that they be repeated. Dr. Rawson, head of the Aptitude Research Staff, his secretary said, was calling Mr. Pismire. Then with an impatience, which was totally unlike her and which Miss Treadway was unable, until later, to understand, she said, "Miss Treadway, this is of the utmost importance. Please try to attend to what I'm saying, and get Mr. Pismire on the line at once."

Nettled by this, and wishing, too, to prolong for George his quiet moment in the sun, Miss Treadway told Dr. Rawson's secretary that she would take the message. Dr. Rawson himself then came to the phone.

"This is Rawson of A.R.S. speaking," he said. "I have a message for George." Dr. Rawson's usually quiet voice had an edge to it, the bias excitement gives.

"I'll give it to him," Miss Treadway said obstinately.

After a slight pause, Dr. Rawson, aware of Miss Treadway's long service and reliability, said, "Very well. Tell him," he said, obviously slowing down his speech by an act of will so that his words arrived at La Pismirada, not only "bitten off" as they say, but with the teeth marks still on them, "tell him that it is important that he get over to the laboratory as quickly as possible. Something important has happened."

Miss Treadway was, of course, aware of the tests in progress at the

A.R.S. laboratories and of what they involved. Dr. Rawson's excitement began to communicate itself to her. She knew she had no right to ask Dr. Rawson any questions concerning what had happened at the A.R.S. laboratories, nor did she. But the emotion which filled her voice as she said, "Dr. Rawson, Dr. Rawson," moved him to say, "You may tell George, Miss Treadway, that the tests confirm it."

She replaced the phone and sat for some minutes trying to control the tremors which, upon hearing Dr. Rawson's words, had become quite general. "The tests confirm it! The tests confirm it!"

The sight of George outside calmed her. He had paused at a large mauve dahlia, the "Ada Pismire." The Dahlia Growers Association had wanted to call it the "George H. Pismire," but George, with characteristic modesty and gallantry, had insisted that the blossom receive his wife's name. Thus, it was at the "Ada Pismire" he had paused while, inside, watching him, Miss Treadway sat repeating the extraordinary words, "The tests confirm it!" By the time she reached him George had moved on to a great shag-headed, bronze beauty, the "Lucius Rideout."

"Mr. Pismire," she said, "Dr. Rawson just called. He wants. . . ."

George interrupted her impetuous speech. He held up one hand. "Just a moment, Miss Treadway," he said. "We are in the presence of beauty. Beauty is timeless and eternal. Let us for a moment enjoy the timeless and eternal without interruption by the timely and temporal."

George had no way of knowing that the message Miss Treadway bore was itself of a timeless and eternal nature. Or perhaps he had. Perhaps he wished, before stepping over the threshold into a new world, to linger for a minute longer in the old world—an imperfect world—but one grown, through familiarity, dear. There was no wind; still the fresh sweet scent of a new cutting of alfalfa drifted in from a near-by field. A buzzard dropped in its arc of timeless beauty. Delicately, delicately, George touched the curled petals of the "Lucius Rideout."

"Now," he said at last. "Now, tell me."

"Dr. Rawson wants you at the laboratory at once. He says," and now that she had reached the crucial words Miss Treadway's voice faltered, "He says . . . the tests confirm it."

George's hand dropped from that burst of burnished copper. Did he sigh? Certainly he replied very softly: "I expected they would."

Miss Treadway could see that he was deeply moved. He stood wordless for a time. Ostensibly regarding the "Lucius Rideout." Actually contemplating a new world.

Finally Miss Treadway ventured to speak. "It solves everything, doesn't it?"

Gravely, George nodded.

"All so pure, now . . . so simple . . . so devoid of conflicts."

"Yes," said George. "Yes."

"Mr. Pismire," she asked on a sudden impulse, "you won't refuse the Jones and McClatchy children the use of your name . . . now? Will you?"

"I suppose not," George replied. "Still I had hoped they might call the girl, Ada Eloise."

"Ada Eloise!" Miss Treadway was too overcome to speak. That he had wished her name to be associated in any way with The Plan! Emotionally, it was the high moment of her life.

"I suppose, however, I must be guided by the wishes of A.R.S. and of the parents," he admitted. Then, seeing how stirred Miss Treadway was, he thoughtfully turned matter-of-fact. "Will you call the A.R.S. laboratories and tell Dr. Rawson that I'll be with him in thirty minutes?"

"I will," Miss Treadway said and parted with him there in the dahlia garden after a handclasp, not long, but grateful.

George's meeting with Dr. Rawson in the A.R.S. laboratories has been depicted in the documentary, "Blueprint for the Future," which is produced by the Pismire Associates. It is true in all respects but one. In the documentary, Dr. Rawson devotes considerable time to an explanation of the situation as regards the Jones and McClatchy children, prior to the period of testing. While George stands quietly listening, amidst the immaculate complexities of the laboratory, Dr. Rawson exposits upon the naturalness of what has occurred. Once Testing had established the Aptitudes of Patrons, he explains, it was to be expected that those Patrons with identical Aptitudes would be much thrown together. They went to work together, played together, came finally to live together in the same sections of either Plamire, or of those other numerous and variously named Patronvilles which had sprung up throughout California. And finally, as was wholly suitable and natural and likewise to be expected, Patrons with Identical Aptitudes began to marry.

The Jones and McClatchy children were products of two such unions of Identical Aptitudes: the McClatchy child, a girl, being two months older than the Jones boy. In the beginning, no one had noticed in her any of that revolutionary uniqueness which later made itself so dramatically known. In the beginning she took her mother's milk in the same manner as any other child and seemed to enjoy it as much. This lasted but a short time, however, and the McClatchy child then refused in quick order, not only this sustenance but every substitute R.A.P. physicians could suggest. Without food she daily weakened and the McClatchys finally despaired of her life.

One evening, though he supposed his action not only hopeless but perhaps positively dangerous, the child's father, Melvin McClatchy, offered his daughter a tidbit he had fetched home from the Hobart Lion Farm. For he, like his wife Modena, was regularly rented either to the Hobarts or to other concerns of a like nature. To Melvin McClatchy's astonishment, his daughter did not refuse this tidbit, as she had all other food, but after swallowing it made known, in her infantile fashion, that she desired more. McClatchy imparted this wonderful news to his wife, then sped back to Hobart's where he obtained such leonine sauces and juices as he thought would best suit an infant of his daughter's age. Fed on these, the McClatchy child ate voraciously and as if to make up for lost time. In a week's time she was entirely changed: bright-eyed, well-fleshed, aggressive and refusing food from all other sources.

The case of the Jones infant, while similar, was not so dramatic since his life was not at any time at stake. His trouble was a seeming revulsion to silence, but his case was less simple than this would indicate. Had mere sound, unparticularized sound, been all he desired, his wishes might easily have been granted: phonograph records, his mother's singing, the hum of traffic about a house situated near some arterial highway, these would have solved the problem. And though any sound would not satisfy young Jones, any sound, it was apparent, was better than no sound at all. In silence, his unhappiness and discontent approached the convulsive stage. Music, singing, talk, these quieted, though they did not stop, his discontented fretting. It was heart-breaking for the Joneses to see their first-born sicken, for lack of something, they knew not what. Then one morning, Joseph Jones II, by way of a busman's holiday—for he, like his wife, was a Patron whose particular Audio-Aptitude kept him busy listening most mornings at those locations where the rating of this or that soap opera happened to be dropping—turned his own radio to a soap-opera.

The effect on the Jones child was instantaneous. His unhappy frettings and whimperings ceased. The look of pained discontent which, since birth, had marred his face was wiped away. He smiled. He began to coo.

He tossed his arms about in childish pleasure. The Joseph Joneses II stood, arms clasped about each other, looking down into the bassinet. For the first time since their child's birth, that greatest of parental pleasures, the sight of their babe contentedly cooing was theirs.

The infant Jones, evidencing pleasure in his bassinet was, of course, unable to understand the words of the soap-opera his father had tuned in. But just as the young Mozart turned naturally to music without at first being able to understand all of its thematic content, so the young Jones, by ear alone and without intellectual comprehension, was able to appreciate the purely auditory values of the soap-opera; the rise and fall of its rich vocalism; the stimulating texture of its varied sound effects; the weeping of its bereft women; the urgency of their voices berating, beseeching, beguiling; the male voices with their implications of fraud, violence, desertion and worse; the tone poems of birds at dawn, cars starting, gates creaking, doors closing and always the footsteps across the always uncarpeted floors. For one with the precise and delicate Aptitudes of the Jones infant this was enough. The raw audio-content devoid of any core of meaning.

So the Jones and McClatchy histories up to the period of testing, and so reported in the first five minutes of the documentary by Dr. Rawson to George Pismire. Notwithstanding the fact that when he stepped into the A.R.S. laboratory George Pismire was as well or better informed concerning the two children than Dr. Rawson himself. When George first saw the documentary, this fabrication somewhat upset him. Not that he did not see its purpose and understand it to be a useful device for conveying information quickly. He understood quite well how tedious (and how boring for those already in possession of these facts) their narration, within the framework of their original time sequence, would be. And for these reasons he considered the Rawson recapitulation, while unhistorical, justified. Nevertheless he often asked that when the time came for a report in words of the Pismire-Rawson meeting, this misrepresentation be cleared up. This is now being done.

The first words actually spoken at that meeting were not by Dr. Rawson to George, but vice versa. Facing Dr. Rawson George Pismire said, very quietly, "The mutations have been confirmed?"

Dr. Rawson's reply was, "In so far as it is possible in this generation, to confirm them."

George then said, "I will not be present to see whether they carry over into the next generation."

Dr. Rawson answered, "You may rest assured that the genes of succeeding generations will carry a blue print of The Pismire Plan."

George then asked, "Will there not need to be some care in mating?" to which Dr. Rawson's reply was, "The drive of like toward like will take care of that."

George was then silent for some moments, thinking. This, the film, ill adapted as it is for the portrayal of either silence or thinking, does not show. Instead, the documentary at this juncture gives us the famous, though historically inaccurate, Rawson soliloquy beginning, as every schoolboy knows, "What is man but the pattern of his genes and that pattern what but Pismire?"

Effective as this soliloquy is, and true as it is to the spirit of the meeting that fall morning in the A.R.S. laboratories, the words which the documentary puts at this point into Rawson's mouth are the thoughts of George Pismire as he stood considering Rawson's statement, "The genes of succeeding generations will carry a blue print of The Pismire Plan." And who can wonder at his silence or his thought? What other man in history has heard such words? Or seen opening before him such a panorama of future order and content? Order and content for which he himself was responsible?

Not that George took any of the credit for the mutations. For in his, "Pismire can make a Plan, Prosper can make a Test, but only God can make a gene," he gives credit where credit is due. But though the tendency was there, how blindly, before Pismire, we were working toward it! How blindly coming to realize that we must adapt or perish! How blindly approaching the fact that the environment with which we had surrounded ourselves was unsupportable! Blind, blind, until Pismire opened our eyes and led us into the light. And in the Pismirian light we could see what we had been enduring, and see that Endurance was not enough. Endurance must be Recompensed. And Recompense alone was not enough. We must be Recompensed for Endurance in our Special Fields. And for this, Testing came into being. And Testing alone was not enough, but only a technique by which Aptitudes could be determined. And Aptitudes, so long as they had to be determined by the media of flash cards and test sheets, were not enough. So the mating of Identical Aptitudes followed. And the mating of Identical Aptitudes was not an end but only a means. The end was the Mutation, the fixing of Aptitudes. And that was enough. Once Aptitudes became fixed, human life could proceed in a manner as predictable and orderly as in an ant colony.

This comparison, by the way, while it is both a justifiable and flattering one (since it is doubtful if the precision and order, the adaptation and stability of the ant colony will ever be equaled by the human colony) was one for which George did not care. It made capital of something utterly personal—his name. If The Plan were praised, he wanted it praised for its merits; if censured, censured because of its flaws; and he wanted neither praise nor criticism to rise out of some fortuitous connection of his name with The Plan.

The Pismire Plan had, actually, received very little adverse criticism. Still, as there are to be found in every age those whose sole Aptitude seems to be for Opposition, so there were those who opposed The Pismire Plan. They did so first, by a mulish profession of finding the order and stability of the ant colony unappealing, and second, by saying that such undesirable attributes must be expected in any plan originated by a man whose very name meant ant.

Criticism of this personal nature hurt George and he realized that with the mutation now confirmed, there would be more of it. His name did mean ant. About that he was not sensitive. Nor was he sensitive concerning legitimate criticism of The Plan. What he resented was the effort to make the issue personal, to discredit The Plan because of some fortuitous connection of his name with a creature whose habits some professed to find unattractive. What had the meaning of his name to do with it? Had it ever been suggested, he asked, that because Mary Lyon founded Mt. Holyoke, that institution was a lion's den? Or that mint jelly should be served with the essays of Charles Lamb? Or that Quakers, because their founder, another George, was also Fox, were foxy? Certainly not. And if The Pismire Plan had merits, they were the merits of The Plan. And if faults, the name Pismire should not be made a springboard for invidious criticism.

There is none of this in the Rawson soliloquy however, since it was decided by the Pismire Associates that it would be foolish to hand out gratuitous ammunition to such persons as opposed The Plan, but did not know the meaning of Pismire.

The concluding dialogue of the documentary, "Blueprint for the Future," is absolutely historical and repeats word for word the conversation of Pismire and Rawson. After George Pismire's long silence, during which he pondered upon what may be called the imponderables of The Plan, he said to Dr. Rawson, "I think I will now take a little walk." He then extended, exactly as is depicted in the picture, his hand to Dr. Rawson, withdrew it and with that air of grave courtesy which always characterized him walked out of the laboratory.

When George left the A.R.S. laboratory, he began the ascent of the hill on whose lower slope the laboratory stands. It was a walk he often took, and usually alone. For the nature and scope of George Pismire's thoughts precluded companionship. Not that he indulged himself with any self-pity because of this. He was well used to loneliness now, to the solitary way of life which is the lot of those whose vision has outrun that of their fellow men.

In the old days, before her arthritis had made her housebound, Ada had often accompanied him on this climb. And though never at any time a woman whose intellectual endowments made her a suitable companion for George Pismire, he missed her—and particularly so this afternoon. They had been childless, but now with the Jones and McClatchy children not only bearing his name, but carrying, as Dr. Rawson assured him, "the blue print of The Pismire Plan in their genes," it seemed that he and Ada were not without issue.

At the top of the little eminence above the A.R.S. laboratories George rested. From here the red tile roof of La Pismirada can be seen, and it was to La Pismirada that George, thinking as he had been of Ada, first turned his eyes that afternoon. But George Pismire was not a man to indulge himself for long with the merely personal: his real home was the world; his wife, The Plan; his offspring, those children whose bodies bore the first fruitage of what had originally flowered in his mind, little Pismire Jones, little Pismira McClatchy.

As he stood looking across the fertile sweep of La Pismirada's acres, George's eyes filled with tears. The day was ending and his life, too, as he well realized, was drawing toward its mortal close. But the tears which filled his eyes were not tears of sadness. Nor were they for himself. They were tears of rejoicing and they were for those generations to come who need never again experience the suffering which had been so common before The Pismire Plan: the suffering of men with uncertain Aptitudes enduring without Recompense an unstable, horrendous way o life. All that was to be changed. Children would be born not only with Stable Aptitudes but with Aptitudes well suited to the environment which awaited them.

And from small beginnings—from Aptitudes adapted to a way of life within a single country there would develop a greater range of Aptitudes. Aptitudes well suited to the whole complex international range of civilized living. Oh, George saw it all that September afternoon! A way of life saved! With Aptitudes stabilized and Recompense assured, future generations could carry on! Endurance would be possible!

The sun was setting; but George looked beyond the sunset to the dawn of a new day. Orderly, precise, Pismirian. Extending his arms he addressed its inheritors.

"Little Pismire, Little Pismira, the world is yours!"

THE WOLF THAT FED US

by Robert Lowry

I. Pfc Joe Hammond

PFC Joe Hammond braced himself as the three tons of American Army truck swung around the corner out of Casserta and onto Route 7 bound for Rome. There were twenty guys in the truck, all of them American GI's except three Englishmen and one Italian. The Englishmen looked a lot alike, lean small fellows in uniforms that were too big for them. All three sat up very straight with their legs crossed. The Italian was pulling with long appreciative drags on a cigarette Burt had given him. Joe looked at Burt and laughed.

"You look like a real combat troop, *amico,*" Joe said. "You oughta see your mug. Can you really see daylight through all that dust?"

"I'm going to keep it there till I get to Rome and sell it to 'em for their penthouse victory gardens," Burt said. He lit a cigarette and pushed his fingers through his blond hair.

Joe looked at his intelligent face with the wide calm blue eyes and thought how much he liked the guy. He was glad he was going to Rome with him. He was glad he was going to Rome with *anybody*. He began to feel an urgent excited way he hadn't felt since he'd been seventeen years old, back before the war, hitchhiking around the country and coming into a big city, like New York or Houston, and wondering what would happen to him there, where he'd stay, what people he'd meet, what kind of job he'd get for a couple weeks before he moved on. He hadn't ever felt this way in the army before. He'd been overseas fifteen months but he'd never had a furlough before and there'd been nothing exciting about going anywhere with the part of the army he was with. He smiled when he thought of the army. He remembered way back two and a half years ago when, after being drafted and dressed up to look something like an American private soldier, he'd waited his turn and been interviewed by a weak-chinned army clerk who never looked him in the eye. "What did you do in civilian life?" the clerk had asked. Joe told him he'd worked for a year on a Chicago newspaper as a police reporter. "You can type then?" the clerk had suggested, his mind working in army channels. "Yeah, I can type," Joe said. So the clerk had put him down as a Typist on his official qualifications card, and for fourteen months he'd worked in an orderly room typing out payrolls and memoranda. He'd finally been transferred to the Public Relations Office, and now he was overseas with a photo reconnaissance wing seeing what it feels like to live in the medieval setting of an Italian village like San Cialo for a year with no place to go except two-year-old GI movies which he'd seen back in the States. No women, no nothing. He laughed.

"What are you laughing at?" Burt said.

"I was laughing at things in general, such as the army."

"I can't get amused," Burt said. "It hurts my side when I try to get amused about the army."

"That's because you're married. I always heard it puts wrinkles on both sides of the mouth when you mix marriage and army."

"Marriage is a wonderful thing if you can work at it," Burt told him. "I always liked marriage till I got overseas for a year and didn't have the chance to investigate it every night."

Joe laughed and braced himself as the truck cut out around a two-wheeled Italian cart. He looked back at the cart and laughed again. The man of the family was riding on the cart, whipping up the donkey, and his wife and three children were walking along barefooted beside it. Every time you passed a cart you saw the same picture. Only sometimes the man of the family was yelling at his wife, children and donkey all at the same time. This old boy was of a kindly turn of mind.

"The sights you do see," he said to Burt.

"Don't worry, you'll see some sights when you get to Rome," a red-headed staff sergeant sitting across from him put in. "When you see the women to choose from in Rome you'll think you hit paradise."

"You been there before?" Burt asked.

"I was there two months ago, in July, just after we took it," the staff sergeant said. "Had to go up there for seven days to take pictures of all the monuments so we could show the world we didn't damage 'em. It took me two days to get the pictures and after that all I did was shack. And what I mean, *shack*. I never seen a place like that before. Women like that."

Joe leaned out of the truck, trying to catch the name of the bomb-shattered town they were coming to. It was Littoria. He looked at Littoria. At what was left of Littoria. A swallow passed over their truck like a strafing Thunderbolt and Joe wondered where the swallow had been hiding out four months ago when all hell had been raging around Littoria. The Italians had already come back to their mashed-up little town and were living among the ruins, breastfeeding their numberless bambinos, selling tomatoes and onions to each other here in the square, keeping happy on their vino. People looked pretty wonderful to Pfc Joe Hammond then as he rode by in the big army truck. Fascist people, democratic people, or just people, the kind these were. The Italian people were a strong people essentially. They showed signs of surviving even Mussolini and the Flying Fortress. But all people were strong people essentially, he thought, amused at his need to make platitudes.

"We're going to Rome!" he said to Burt suddenly, putting his hand on Burt's arm.

"Yeah?" Burt said. "Tell me more."

"I feel like I used to feel when I was eight years old and on my way to Coney Island."

"You'll think you're in Coney Island when you see them Rome signorinas," the red-headed staff sergeant interrupted again. Then the staff sergeant pulled a Hershey bar out of his bag, peeled it, and began biting off chunks of it.

The driver, a little corporal with a Jersey accent, stopped the truck in the outskirts of Rome on a street lined with modern apartment houses and got out and looked at the load of furlough-happy soldiers he'd collected along the road from Bari.

"This is it, men. I'm turning off here and going on around the town."

The twenty of them picked up their luggage and climbed out. They stood there on the street awkwardly, not knowing exactly what to do now.

"Don't forget to take a pro," the driver yelled back at them out of the cloud of dust his wheels kicked up.

Joe hailed an empty carriage going by, and he and Burt climbed in. He told the driver to take them to the Colosseum. "I know that's in the center of town anyhow."

"We could go to the Red Cross and find out about rooms," Burt suggested.

"Let's stay away from everything GI for these seven days," Joe said. "Let's make the whole thing an adventure."

"It'll be an adventure all right," Burt said. "An adventure in spending all the dough we've saved up for two months."

They got out in front of the Colosseum and started walking. They took in every hotel they came to but there was no room for them. They walked all the way to the Tiber.

"I feel like a real yokel looking at these buildings and women this way," Joe said.

"A year in the wilds of San Cialo would make a yokel out of anybody."

Joe talked to an MP on the Tiber Bridge.

"Go on over there and try some of them apartment houses," the MP told them. "Lots of guys get rooms in private apartments."

They walked half a mile before they found a place behind the Palace of Justice where the janitor said yes, Signor Valsetti had a vacant room. He told them to wait, and came back five minutes later with an elderly fellow slopping along in bedroom slippers and squinting at them through horn-rim glasses.

The two GI's followed him through the courtyard and up the dark staircase to a big oak door that had his name, MARIO VALSETTI, on it.

"It is nice room," he said. "You like it."

He unlocked the door and they went in.

"My wife, Signora Valsetti." He bowed with his palms held out.

While Signora beamed, Joe looked from her to her husband. They were an odd couple, he thought. She was perhaps thirty-eight or forty, at least twelve or fifteen years younger than he was. Seeing them side by side, this weak-chested squinty-eyed old man and his buxom brightly dressed wife, you felt that somewhere she had found the secret of drawing from him all his vigor and life. But in ordinary times, Joe thought, she would be much plumper than she is now, and not so attractive.

There was a lot of to-do about getting their names straight.

"You can call me Giuseppe, if that helps," Joe said, "but there's nothing you can do about Burt. I don't know the Italian for Burt."

"Giuseppe," Signora Valsetti repeated, smiling at him. "Burt."

The room was clean and large, with a big window, two single beds, a dresser, table, and wash basin.

"It's okay," Burt said, and old Valsetti smiled and bowed, and closed the door on them.

"Let's have a drink." Burt brought the bottle of cherry brandy out of his bag. "Let's start the great adventure off right."

"It burns good on an empty stomach," Joe said. They had another drink apiece. "The whole furlough is getting to look better and better every minute."

The brandy made his head warm, and Joe felt like talking.

"I've been dead for a year," he said, "but I'm beginning to feel alive again already. I feel like a kid when school is out in the summer. It's a big city and anything can happen to you here."

"Meaning that you can meet decent women who don't turn and run at the sight of a soldier like those down in San Cialo."

Joe looked at him and laughed. "Yeah," he said. "Meaning women. I've got to meet a woman again. I haven't even talked to a woman for a year and a half."

"Let's have another drink."

"What about you?" Joe asked him. "You haven't said anything very enthusiastic yet."

"I still feel slightly married," Burt said. "I'm the kind of guy who'll spend all day at the Sistine Chapel staring at the ceiling."

Joe took another drink. "I want to do that too." He got up and walked to the window. It was a big apartment house, six stories high, built around a courtyard. Down below Joe saw three Italians tinkering with a Fiat. From a window across the courtyard two pretty girls stared over at him.

"Yeah, I think I may still be alive after all." He sat his overweight body down on the bed and reached for the bottle. "I'd even forgotten what it feels like to live in an apartment house with hundreds of other people all looking interesting when you see them once or twice a day, leading their own private lives. I feel like running all around this building knocking on doors and meeting everybody here."

"That would be an original approach anyhow," Burt said, lying back on the bed.

Joe began to wash his hands. "I do want to see this city though. I want to see the way people are after they've lived in a big town like Rome, under Fascism, for twenty-two years. I want to see what the war has done to them."

"Especially to the women."

"Yeah, maybe especially to the women. Maybe that's the important experience I'm after again. Maybe that's why I'm beginning to feel like a corpse come to life."

"You go ahead and see the women," Burt said. "Don't mind me. I'm going to do some sketching. It looks like the kind of city I can get interested in."

He isn't kidding, Joe thought. He's that kind of guy. He'd been an architect in civilian life, but his real interest was the sketching and painting he did in his spare time. For pleasure, not profit, Joe thought, like most of the good things in the world.

"It's too bad we couldn't get two rooms." Joe began to wash his face.

"I think we'll both have plenty of space in here to do what we want to do. I'll stay out while you're investigating the private life of the feminine side of Rome."

Joe laughed. He could have laughed at anything. He felt free and alive again. The only thing he'd have had to do to complete the feeling was change his army uniform to a pair of gabardines and a white broadcloth shirt.

"Let's lie down for an hour," he said, "then go walk around the town."

But he couldn't sleep, lying there. The swarming activity of the great city seemed to be drawing him toward it. His heart beat fast. He thought about the girls he would meet, remembering the adventures other guys had told him about. He wondered what the names of the girls he would meet would be, and what they were doing now, this minute, a whole day or week in time before they would meet him.

Something is going to happen to me, Joe thought, unless I explode first.

II. Maria Consorte

First thing she heard, even before she opened her eyes, was the precise metallic ticking of his watch on the dresser beside the bed. She rolled over away from him and saved the next moment deliciously. It was always a little game with her when she woke up, to find out what would be the first thing she'd see. Now she kept her eyes tight closed, a smile turning up the edges of her full wide mouth. She opened them suddenly—and burst out laughing very loud. It was so ridiculous, what she saw: a little man, a midget *capitano Americano!* For his officer's cap was on the dresser and his officer's coat was hung over the back of the chair which was right in front of the dresser—and his pants, even his pants were placed on the chair, so that you'd think there stood a real *capitano Americano,* a *bambino capitano!*

She looked around this room in the Rome Officers' Rest Camp Hotel, comparing it with her own room far across the city, which was tiny and mean, everything old, the rug worn out, no running water, the window too little. She had been sleeping here every night for a whole week—she had hardly slept in her own room at all since she'd rented it. How long had she been in Rome? It was over two weeks already. She remembered the ride up in the American lieutenant's jeep. He had driven very fast and she had laughed, it was so much fun to pass the little carts in which she had had to ride all her life, pass them fast and not care about anything. He had treated her nice, that lieutenant, but he had not been truthful. For one day, when he'd told her to meet him in the park, he had not come, and she had waited in front of this hotel and he had not come out and then she'd seen his friend and gone up to him, but the friend said he had gone, back to his base. . . . There hadn't been anything else for her but to stay in Rome and do what all the other women in Rome were doing, walking in the streets and in the Villa Borghese, picking up the *Americani,* sleeping with them for a meal and sometimes money. She did not know anything about how much money, and she never bothered to ask for money. But many of them were decent to her, they gave her money anyhow. . . . It was odd, nineteen days ago she'd been just a girl, Maria Consorte, seventeen years old, always hungry with the *Tedesci* eating everything, never having slept with a man, talking only to the girls she knew in the neighborhood, never even daring to be seen on the street with a man—and now she was in Rome, knowing only men. And she had celebrated the change by dyeing her hair a bright yellow, and plucking her eyebrows, and wearing rouge thicker on her mouth. What her father would have said to her if he could have seen her, walking the streets with soldiers, rouged up like that! But her father was far away, a prisoner in Africa. He would never know.

It must be very late, she thought. The sun streamed through the window and the avenue was alive with the sound of army cars and girls laughing and pedlars calling out to the soldiers to buy, and shoeshine boys saying: "Shine! *Americano* polish! Very goot!" She looked at the officer. He was young, and yet his face in sleep seemed older than the face of her father. It was a long sharp face, with dark patches under the eyes, and the silky blond hair was thinning on each side making an M in front. He was an *aviatore,* from somewhere near Florence. He drank very much and he made love to her very little. Her head felt groggy now: last night, when she'd met him at their usual hour, he had been drunk, and he had brought her up here and made her get drunk too, and then they had both just gone to sleep. And now, even though she had burst out laughing before, he still did not wake up.

She sat up in bed feeling restless and hungry. She had been hungry for four years and even though she ate well now she was still hungry.

"Buon giorno, baby," he said.

She looked at him in that naughty way out of the corner of her eyes that always made him laugh and said the American words she knew: "Hel-lo, baby! I love you ve-ry moch!" Then she reached down and kissed him roughly on the mouth.

"No, no," he said. "Let's go *mangiare,* baby."

She got into her pants and her tight brassière that made her breasts look nice and the fire-engine-red dress that fitted her well around the hips, and the wedgies that increased her height a full three inches. He dressed very carefully, shaving, then putting on clean underwear, and brushing lint off his pants before he slipped them on. Officers dressed differently than enlisted men.

They went down the steps and past the Negro MP at the door out into the sunshine. Along the street before the string of American officers' hotels, girls stood waiting for pick-ups. They walked to a little restaurant they ate at every morning and ordered eggs, two each, bread and wine. Maria laughed at everything and rolled her eyes at her *capitano.* But he wasn't feeling good, he stared out the window a lot. He paid the bill for the breakfasts, six hundred lire, and gave her the change from the thousand lira note. Out on the street they parted, just as they did every morning, and he told her he would see her in front of the hotel at five o'clock. She watched him as he walked off: an enlisted man saluted him, and he saluted back. That made her laugh. She did not understand her *capitano.* She did not comprehend why he did not laugh more and think life was as funny as she thought it.

A jeep-load of American soldiers passed with all the GI's shouting and waving at her, but she paid no attention. A tall Polish soldier, wearing glasses, nudged her and said something, but she hurried on down the street. Now it was eleven o'clock, six hours till she would see the *capitano* again. She would go shopping. Maybe she would buy a pretty handkerchief.

The town was crowded with soldiers on furlough: Americans, English, French, Poles. It was September 1944 and the war had gone through Rome and on. Everywhere she went, whenever she stopped, they were after her, begging her to come with them, offering her money, telling her she was pretty, taking her arm. But she only laughed, and went into stores to get rid of them. It made her feel wonderful though to have all of them talking to her. She felt like the one desirable girl in all Rome, the prettiest.

She walked around for two hours but she did not buy anything. It was one o'clock and very hot. What should she do? She felt hungry. She had three thousand lire in her purse but somehow she did not want to spend it. Almost unconsciously she began to walk toward the Villa Borghese, where the casino had been converted to an American Enlisted Men's Club. She remembered her *capitano* for a moment as she went under the arch of the old Roman wall, but then she was walking down the promenade, past the soldiers sitting on the benches. Some of them whistled at her, some of them said *"Vene qua,"* but she only smiled. If they wanted *her* they would have to come to her.

On the other side of the street she saw two American soldiers, one of them a thin blond fellow, the other a chunky dark boy. They sat on a bench their feet spread out before them, both looking boredly off into space. That lackadaisical way about them excited her—would they notice *her*? Would they brighten up when they saw *her* pass by in her red dress, Maria Consorte, seventeen years old, of Ancona? Deliberately, she crossed the street. The blond soldier glanced at his friend and both drew in their feet—she knew they were looking at her and then she saw the blond fellow turn to his friend, chiding him, and the dark fellow was looking at her intensely.

"Buon giorno," the dark fellow said, and Maria smiled, not slowing her step, not looking around at them as she passed.

But he was at her elbow.

"Hello," he said, and then in Italian, "Where are you going?"

"I'm walking," she said. "I'm always walking."

"May I walk with you?"

She glanced at him and smiled. She noticed the eager look in his eyes, and she felt how nervous he was. She began to feel nervous too.

They turned a corner, he reached down and took her hand.

"You are very beautiful," he said.

"All the soldiers say that."

"Yes," he said, "you are beautiful."

They walked on, down the treelined avenue, farther into the park.

He took her arm and made her stop, turned her toward him. "What is your name?" he asked.

"Maria. Maria Consorte."

"My name is Joe. Giuseppe."

"Giuseppe."

He was looking into her face as if it were the face of someone he was trying to remember. She knew he was going to ask her, and so she simply waited there for him to ask. She let her mouth smile and she raised her eyebrows a little, in the way that she had learned.

"Come to my house with me," he said in Italian.

She turned, they walked on. "I am hungry," she said. "I must eat now."

"Sure we'll eat." He was forgetting himself, speaking English. "I'm hungry too."

"We'll eat," she said. "And then I will go to your house with you."

At the park entrance they got into a carriage and rode down the hill, past the string of officers' hotels (where she looked the other way so her *capitano* wouldn't see her), to a restaurant. She found herself really hungry and she ate and ate. Green noodles, four fried eggs, beefsteak, bread, wine. She ate every last noodle, holding her fork awkwardly in her fist and diving in. She felt him watching her and she laughed up at him. She held his hand under the table and looked around at the other people—a sailor sitting with a paleskinned girl who wore her hair shoulder-length. Two civilian men. Four soldiers side by side at a big table in the corner, all of them with many stripes on their arms. She looked at the arm of her soldier. No stripes at all.

One of the four soldiers said something to Giuseppe and Giuseppe laughed and turned to her. In Italian he said, "They told me they brought four girls in here to eat last night. The girls ate fifteen dollars' worth of food and were very nice to them while the meal was going on. Then the girls said goodbye and left them. They said did I know you, because you would probably do the same thing. I said, no, you're not that kind of girl. You're my friend."

"Those girls were no good," Maria said. "I'm not like those girls."

Giuseppe smiled, and she smiled back at him. She took his hand lying on the table. She wanted the four soldiers over there who thought that of her to see her take his hand.

"Are you from Rome?" Giuseppe asked. "I'm from San Cialo. Far away. I got here last night. On furlough."

"Last night," she said. "No, I'm from Ancona. Eighteen days ago I was in Ancona. Now I'm in Rome. An American officer brought me. He devirginized me and brought me here. Eighteen days ago," she said, as if it were a period of days she wanted to remember, "I was a virgin. Now I'm not a virgin any more. Now I'm having a good time."

He looked into her child's face—at the plucked eyebrows, the round blue eyes, the large painted mouth, the smooth neck with the little dent at the throat. "I like you very much," he said, and she touched his cheek with her hand. He was not like her *capitano*. He laughed much more than her *capitano*. She liked him very much too.

"Let's go," she said. "Let's go *presto*."

They went out of the restaurant and one of the soldiers shouted, "Take your time" to her soldier. She did not understand what he meant.

They took a carriage. Crossing the Tiber she pointed out the Vatican to him. The horse smelled good, the sun beat down, people looked around at them. They stopped at the apartment house, he paid the driver, then turned and told her to wait a moment before she followed him in.

She waited the moment and followed, through a great door, across the courtyard around which the apartment house was built. She went into the cool shadows of the hallway, and he was waiting. He kissed her on the cheek and they mounted the stairs hand in hand. She giggled when he squeezed her hand—even now it felt foolish to be going to a room with a boy she'd met just an hour before.

He rapped three times with the knocker. MARIO VALSETTI, said the brass nameplate. Now footsteps sounded in the apartment and the door opened a crack, opened wider. He motioned for her to come. A stout pouter-pigeon of a woman, overrouged and with her hair carefully done up close to her head, held the doorknob in her hand and looked first at the soldier, then at Maria. The woman's mouth hung open and Maria noticed that her teeth were very white and had a slight division between the front two. She could not tell whether the astonishment was just the way the woman always looked or whether she was going to say something. She did not feel very good being looked at like that. And in the next room she saw another woman, darker and younger than this one, also peering in at her.

"Signora Valsetti, una amica mia, Maria Consorte," Giuseppe said, and Maria was so confused at being introduced, just like nothing doing, that she forgot to take the hand offered her. Giuseppe had her arm and led her through a dining room, down a little dark hall, into a bedroom.

He locked the door and came over to her. *"Bella,"* he said. His mouth was warm.

She looked at him sidewise, the way she knew how, saying the American words that made the soldiers laugh: "Hel-lo baby! I love you ve-ry moch!" And he laughed.

And they sat on the side of the bed and smoked cigarettes.

"You are very beautiful," he said.

She laughed and squeezed his hand.

"I am always light," she said. "I am always laughing."

"I love you because you are always laughing."

"Sadness is no good," she said, and her child's face was very serious with this thought.

"You are blond," he said. "You have beautiful hair."

"It isn't real," she said. "I am really brunette."

She reached for her purse. It was crammed full of things. In her purse was really everything she owned. An unopened pack of Lucky Strike cigarettes a soldier had given her two days ago, a handkerchief, lipstick, two sticks of American chewing gum, a red comb, a tiny bottle of perfume, thirty dollars, a police registration card, a little folder of pictures. She took out the little folder of pictures. She showed him a photo of herself with an American lieutenant. "This is the lieutenant," she said. "He devirginized me. He brought me to Rome. Now he is gone. Eighteen days ago I was in Ancona. I was a virgin. Now I am in Rome—" and she threw her arms around his neck and kissed him—"and I am always light. I am always laughing."

Giuseppe was looking at the picture. It was worn, she had brought it out of her fat purse many times to look at and to show. There stood Maria Consorte of Ancona, seventeen years old—a dark-haired, dark-eyed girl, plump, large-breasted. The lieutenant was young and lean, the Texas type, his arm around Maria and his eyes staring fixedly at the camera. But there was really no one in the picture who resembled the slim painted blond girl sitting beside Giuseppe.

"It's so hot!" she said, and stood up and began to take off her dress.

He unbuttoned her tight brassière and pulled off her lace pants. Then he got out of his own clothes quickly, as if he didn't want to embarrass her by letting her be the only one naked.

He stood looking down at her and she had to laugh, he seemed so serious.

In the little bed she threw herself on him: he was food and drink and life to her. And she laughed at him and rubbed noses with him, and pointed to his naked body and laughed, because the miracle of a man's body was still something very funny to her.

It was stifling hot in the room with the curtains drawn and afterward he got up and brought a washrag and washed her face and it felt so good and she loved him for that, and she spread the washcloth out on her chest and lay there smiling up at him. And then he brought her a glass of water and held it while she drank from it, and she said, "I am your *bambina*," and laughed at that and threw her arms wildly around his neck and hugged him.

"You are very thin now," he said, noticing the way her ribs stood out. "In the photo you were a little fat. I like you a little fat. You eat many eggs and spaghetti. Then you will be plump again."

"I like to be a little thin," she said. "I am prettier."

"No, you must eat," he said. He reached into the barracks bag on the floor and brought out three chocolate bars and she put them into her purse.

Then she saw the time on the dresser alarm clock. Four ten. She jumped out of bed. "I have to go," she said. "To meet my *capitano*."

"You love your *capitano*?" he asked.

She looked at him, laughing. "He is good to me," she said.

Dressed, her lipstick on, her blond hair still wild though she'd combed it, she came over to him and put her hands on his shoulders.

"Tomorrow I will see you?"

"Yes," he said.

"At one o'clock, the same place?"

"Yes," he said.

"I will wait for you. Will you wait for me, if I am late?"

"Yes," he said. She saw that he was a little sad. She laughed at him, and kissed him on the mouth, very lightly in order not to spoil the mouth she'd made herself.

Going out she noticed the other bed. "Why? Your blond friend?"

"Yeah," Giuseppe said.

"*No buono*, two in room." She laughed. "For a girl, *no buono*."

"I know," he said. "Impossible to find another bedroom."

He went to the door with her. "Tomorrow," she said, "I will wait for you. You will wait for me?"

He squeezed her hand and she squeezed his hand back, hard as she could.

"Goodbye, ba-by," Maria said. "I love you ve-ry moch."

Walking quickly as her strong peasant legs would carry her up the street toward the Officers' Hotel, she felt sad for the first time all day. She did not know why she was sad, but that was the way she was. She did not really want to be running from the bedroom of Giuseppe to the bedroom of the *capitano.* That cool washrag had been very nice. . . .

She saw the jeep in front of the hotel before she spotted him behind the wheel—another girl and another officer with him. She ran, climbed in beside him and off they went. They rode all around the city, taking many photographs, and when they came back to the hotel it was already growing dark. Her *capitano* had a bottle of whisky with him, he was a little drunk. Those two in the back seat were a little drunk too, and her head, well it wasn't exactly steady.

After they'd said goodbye to the other couple and gone up to her *capitano's* room, he poured out two more stiff drinks in big glasses, mixing hers with water. "Drink, baby," he said, pulling her onto his knee and feeling her breast. "Drink and be happy, cause tomorrow your daddy's gonna die." He said it in English and she didn't understand, so she just laughed and looked at him sidewise and said: "Hel-lo, baby. I love you ve-ry moch!" Then she kissed him, as hard as she knew how.

She forgot to turn and wave to her *capitano,* she was so excited with what she had to do. She did not notice the soldiers who spoke to her either now—she had fifty dollars in her fat red purse and she was off to do her shopping. And tomorrow the trip—she'd be all dressed up in her new outfit. New shoes, new dress, new purse, even new underwear. Tomorrow he was going back to his base near Florence, and she could go along—for a whole week she could stay with him. After that, of course, she'd have to come back to Rome. But a week was a long way off, and now she could buy and buy and buy. And at one o'clock, she thought suddenly, I will meet Giuseppe and he is nice too. Her life seemed very full and certain to her right now, as if the world were arranged only for her to enjoy many adventures dressed up in her brand-new clothes.

She found a white cord purse to sling over her shoulder which she bought for ten dollars, but she could not find a dress she liked. Things were disappearing fast from the shops. Everybody in Rome was buying

buying buying, especially the girls, with all the American money that was filling up the town. She could almost see all that American money flowing out of the stores and into the gutters, stacks and piles of it like fall leaves.

At twelve-thirty she headed up the street toward the park, sure he would come. He had been too nice to her not to come.

She thought she would see him right away, sitting on the bench, but he wasn't there. She walked down to the spot where she had first seen him. When she hesitated, a soldier came over and spoke to her. She turned away, walked on down the street, around the corner, the same way they'd taken the day before. She sat on a bench a moment. Would he come? Yes, he would come, she thought. Then looking at her watch she laughed at herself. It was only quarter to one, of course he wasn't here yet.

At one she looked at the bench again. But no Giuseppe. Three GI's, a little drunk, came down the pavement and tried to stop her. She hurried by them.

At one-fifteen she came back to the empty bench and stared at it very hard, as if trying to make sure that he really wasn't there. She didn't want to sit down, she knew there would be soldiers on either side of her right away. So she just stood in front of it, looking out over the terrace.

It was after lunch, more soldiers were flooding into the park. All of them looked at her, some of them whistled at her, still others stopped, or said *"Vene qua"* as they passed. She felt suddenly very lonely, she wished hard that he would come. It seemed to make a difference now in her life that he should come, where before she hadn't bothered even to think of it.

One-thirty on her watch. First she looked up the street, then she looked down the street. She felt hungry, she hadn't been able to eat very much this morning, she'd been so anxious to go out and begin buying things.

Four American soldiers were crossing the street to her. She continued to stare at the park entrance so they wouldn't think she was inviting them. But they were all around her anyhow. "Hello baby." "*Come state,* beautiful." "Look at the beautiful eyes she's got, Bill." "*Vene con mio,* baby. *Molto mangiare,* sweetheart."

"No," she said in Italian, "I am waiting for someone."

"*Vene qua,* baby. *Soldata niente arrivare. Vene con nou-ee.*"

She couldn't help smiling, they pronounced the words so funny and looked so eagerly at her, as if she were the only girl left in the world. And when they saw the smile, they started positively grabbing her arms and trying to march her up the street with them. She shook her head, held her arms in very close to her sides and looked up and down the street anxiously.

And that moment she saw him she could not have told him how glad she was. He came fast, sweating a lot. It was her little personal triumph to be able to say *"Arrivederci"* very firmly to the soldiers and walk toward him. After all, *she* had appointments too, she did not have to pick up with just anybody.

"You waited long?" he asked in Italian, taking her arm possessively. She felt very strong and sure of herself now. His fingers were strong on her soft forearm, as if she had always belonged to him.

"Yes," she said. "Long."

"Excuse me, Maria. I was in a bar with my blond pal. There was no clock. It makes me happy that you waited for me."

"But I said I would wait for you!"

He laughed at her and squeezed her hand.

"And who were your friends?" he asked.

"They were not my friends! They would not go away. They told me they would give me much money, much to eat, if I would come with them. I did not want to come with them."

Her Giuseppe laughed. He was pleased. She was glad that he was pleased that she had waited.

"Are you hungry?" he asked. "Shall we eat now?"

She was hungry all right, four years' worth, but she did not want him to think that was the only reason she had waited.

"I'm not very hungry. I ate a lot this morning."

"That's all right," he said in English. "You can eat some more."

They found a restaurant a few blocks down the hill from the park. Only civilians sat at the tables, they stared at her critically. But she did not care about their looks, she sat holding hands with him, pretending they were really in love. She looked into his face and it seemed now she was seeing it for the first time. A large face, with thick close-cropped hair and deep eyes that scared her a little when they looked at her. He had high cheekbones, making his eyes seem slanted, and full lips almost as red as a girl's. It was a fleshy face—he himself gave the impression of being very large, like a bear. The uniform he wore hung on him loosely, not neat and tailored-looking like the other soldiers, as if his body refused to conform to it.

The supercilious look of the Italian waiter irritated Maria, and when she found that the meat was tough, she told him, "This is horse meat!" The waiter only raised his eyebrows at her and walked away, but a man across the room said, "No, it's not horse meat." When the waiter came back he said to her, "What do you want, signorina, the best in the land?" "No," she said right back at him, "but I feel sorry for the poor *cavallo*."

Nevertheless she ate every last bite of the *cavallo,* and two eggs and bread and tomatoes besides. Giuseppe looked at her, smiling all the time, as if he enjoyed seeing her eat.

Now the waiter came over with the check. Maria picked it up. "Eight hundred lire for horse meat," she said to the waiter. He raised his eyebrows again. He looked at the soldier, who was counting out the price.

"Yes," Giuseppe answered in Italian, "I have much love for this signorina."

And Maria beamed at the foolish waiter, she was so satisfied with Giuseppe's answer.

They walked arm in arm toward the Tiber.

"It is nice to walk," said Maria.

"Like this," he said, holding her hand.

"Like engaged people," Maria said.

"How do married people do?" Giuseppe asked her.

She locked her arm in his and leaned her whole weight on him and laughing up into his face she said, "Like this!"

"Tomorrow," he said, "we'll get married."

That made her laugh very hard. "Yes!" she laughed. "Tomorrow we'll get married!"

"Necessary for you to come home and meet my mother," he said. " 'Mother, this is Maria. Maria, this is my mother.' "

"Yes," she laughed, keeping her arm locked in his, "tomorrow we'll get married."

They stopped on the bridge and leaned over. Down there girls were swimming, two boys were rowing a boat. "Look," Maria said. "All girls. Alone. There are no men for them to swim with."

He looked, and it was true.

"War is no good," Maria said as they walked on.

He did not seem to hear her for a moment, then he squeezed her hand and said, "No good."

She lay in the bed beside her bear, Giuseppe. He leaned on his elbow, looking at her. He kissed her on both her eyes and pressed hard against her forehead with his cool hand.

"Tomorrow I can see you," she said.

"Tomorrow and tomorrow-tomorrow, and tomorrow-tomorrow-tomorrow," he said. "I will be here for six days yet."

"Oh," Maria exclaimed, putting both her hands on his face. "I didn't tell you! Tomorrow night I am leaving. Tomorrow night my *capitano* is taking me to his town with him. Vicinity Florence. I did not tell you," she said. And she smiled. "But I will be back in a week."

"In a week I will be gone."

"But tomorrow," she said, looking at his serious face, and finding a reason for both of them to be glad again, "tomorrow I will see you. Tomorrow we will be all alone together."

"Tomorrow," he said.

And laughing she threw herself on him, kissing him hard. "Sadness is no good. We will laugh. I am always laughing. I am always light."

But at four-thirty as he walked back with her part of the way to her *capitano's* hotel, she held tightly to his hand to stop her insides from swimming around.

"The war is no good," Maria said quietly. "We are always saying goodbye. It is not good to say goodbye."

He took her arm and stopped her and turned her to him.

"You are a good person, Maria," said the large face of her bear Giuseppe. "I love you very much."

And then he kissed her, lipstick or no lipstick, right there on the street, and left her.

She walked fast, she was late for her *capitano,* but twice she turned and looked at Giuseppe walking along. She wanted to wave to him, but they did not look back at the same moment.

One-fifteen. He wasn't there.

She stared out over the park. Everything fresh and green, it had rained this morning. She hadn't cared about the rain—she'd gone shopping anyhow, had found her dress, a blue one for three thousand lire.

She was calm today, not anxious as she had been yesterday. And yet all the while she knew he wouldn't come. She even felt it would be better if he didn't come today.

At one thirty-five she walked slowly out of the park and down the street. The rain had scared away the soldiers, no one spoke to her. She walked aimlessly, without a place to go till five o'clock. Fleetingly she thought of her mother in Ancona, and how she had just gone off suddenly with the lieutenant, not even bothering to tell her anything.

Once, far in the distance, she thought she saw the bear Giuseppe, but she could not be sure. It was funny, always she was thinking she saw someone she knew.

She began to hum "September in the Rain" to herself, so that she wouldn't think about anything. She walked all the way back across the Tiber, behind the Vatican to her tiny room with the leaking faucet.

She undressed there, thinking how odd to be all alone, to be without a man near by. She stared up at the ceiling, visualizing animal shapes in the stained places on the wallpaper.

At five, she thought, I will leave Rome. For a week. What will it be like, with my *capitano*? Where will I live? What will happen to me?

The week ahead seemed a long time to her. It was gay to go on a trip. It was fun to ride along the road fast in a little jeep and pass all the carts and wear a hanky around her blond hair and laugh at her serious *capitano* who always said, "Tomorrow I'm going to die, baby, so gimme another kiss."

His friend rode behind them in the jeep, and her *capitano* drove. His friend was a short dark *tenente* who wore glasses and was always spitting. She did not like him, but already he had pinched her twice when her *capitano* wasn't looking and smiled at her meaningfully whenever she glanced his way.

The Italian countryside looked fresh and new—she felt she had never seen anything like it before. She began to sing in the jeep, singing "September" a little out of tune at the top of her voice.

"She's feeling good, Mike," said the *tenente* from the back seat. "She must like the brand you've been giving her."

Her *capitano* looked at her. "She's always this way," he said. "She says she doesn't like to be sad. Says she's always light, always laughing. A funny girl."

She knew they were talking about her, and she looked at her *capitano* sidewise and said, "Hello ba-by. I love you ve-ry moch!"

And she put her hand on her *capitano's* leg and lay her head on his shoulder.

Was it the growing dusk that made her tired? She closed her eyes. All kinds of thoughts whirled through her head, she could not stop them. She thought of Giuseppe, not with anger that he had stood her up, but almost in gratitude that he had treated her for one day as a lover. But thinking of him she suddenly realized something that hadn't come to her before. He was only a *privato,* she thought. He could never have taken me away from Rome for a week, like my *capitano*. He could never have bought me the dress and the pocketbook, and he did not have a jeep. . . . And she saw then, very clearly, that fate had been kind to her, Maria Consorte, seventeen years old, of Ancona, Italy, who twenty days ago had been a virgin.

III. Pfc Joe Hammond

"Fountains," Joe said. They were both drunk. They stood on the far side of the Piazza di Spagna, the fountain in the middle of the square between them and the wide steep steps that reached up to the church. "Let us have a few words on fountains . . . from the Reverend Burton," Joe said.

"I like them," Burt said.

"The city of fountains," Joe said.

They weren't in the leaning stage, they were just both very flushed and warm, content to stand in the middle of the sidewalk and look at one thing carefully and profoundly for a long time. At the bottom of the steps behind the fountain were flower stands at which people were stopping and buying.

"Flowers," Joe said, "and fountains. It's beautiful and it's sex. Everything in Rome means sex."

"Fountains don't mean sex," Burt said.

"You're too sober," said Joe, "and you haven't read enough Freud. Friend, anything running or just creeping along means sex. Any movement at all, friend. That's sex."

"Let's go. Your brilliance dazzles me today."

They moved off down Via del Babuino, they were doing fine with all the anasetta under their belts.

"I feel about ten feet high today," Joe said. "I feel like there never was an army or a war."

Burt laughed. "The blond must have done that to you."

"The blond," Joe said, "the blond the blond the blond. . . ."

But his heart was pounding, he felt suddenly melancholy.

Three Italian sailors, foolish black ribbons hanging from their blue tams, passed them walking fast.

"You never see them with the girls," Burt noticed.

"It could be a matter of money," Joe said. "You don't buy many meals with three cents a day or whatever they get."

Far down the street an Italian girl in a bright blue dress, very slim and dark, with dark hair swishing to her shoulders, was coming toward them, hanging on the arm of a fat, glasses-wearing GI shorter than she. The girl was looking at her GI till the moment she noticed the three sailors. She let go his arm and stared straight ahead.

"Look," Burt said grabbing Joe's arm.

The sailors had separated. Two of them were crossing the street. The other was walking faster now.

"What's going on?" Burt said.

The third sailor had passed the soldier and the girl on the other side of the street and now he was crossing over fast. The girl's scream came just as the three reached her. She ran into the street but the three sailors had her, and the fat GI, amazed, was standing flatfooted, an onlooker.

Joe and Burt didn't see the two MPs till they ran by. They went in on the scramble of sailors-and-girl, clubs swinging, the girl's scream bright in the street. Two carabinieri arrived from nowhere with much flailing of arms and much Italian language.

Out of the fray rolled a sailor cap, like a blue wheel. It was over.

The two MPs were holding one swarthy struggling sailor, but the two others were on the ground unconscious and one of the carabinieri, still shouting, came in close and kicked a head.

Joe and Burt stood on the other side of the street and stared at the girl, who was sitting on the curb sobbing out Italian words they didn't understand.

"What's she got in her hand?" Joe asked.

She turned her head at the sound of his voice and Joe felt Burt's hand tighten on his arm. "It's hair!" Burt said. "The kid's been cropped."

IV. Nina Bonte

AT TEN minutes till eleven, seven days of the week, the two steel doors of the Bar Nazionale, Via Nazionale, Rome, Italy, were opened by Antonio the busboy, and the soldiers of six United, Allied, and Supporting nations began to fill up the place, crowding round in front of Nina Bonte and occupying the eight red steel chairs the bar boasted. The fact that there were exactly eight chairs, not five, not fifteen, was a carefully calculated detail of the Bar Nazionale. The less chairs in her bar, Nina Bonte, proprietress and cashier, had decided, the bigger crowd of Rome's furlough-crazy liberators she could pile into it. At the same time Nina thought that the two red steel tables and the eight red steel chairs gave her establishment a certain atmosphere. She was proud of her bar and proud of herself for the amount of money she made in it every day.

The doors had already been open for half an hour this Saturday morning in September 1944. Straddling her high stool Nina was well into the swing of the day's crazy routine—grabbing money, making change, shouting to Antonio to gather glasses from the tables, pouring drinks herself, setting down certain drunken soldiers who tried to grab her across the bar, giving others smiles and wisecracks, saying *"Ciao"* to civilian friends who wandered through, pointing out customers to her barmen, talking and grabbing and grabbing and talking. And always Nina Bonte's strong broad hands were filled with lira notes. Always one hand was in the cash register making change and one hand was outstretched with a bouquet of the beautiful money flooding in to her.

Nina Bonte's whole life was built around these lira notes. They came from men wearing every kind of insignia: from privates, corporals, leading aircraftsmen, first sergeants, second lieutenants. They came from pilots, snipers, draftsmen, typists, navigators, paratroopers, demolition men, rear gunners, cooks, photographers, tank men, anti-tank men, radio operators, artillerymen, camouflage artists. They came from men of every far city she'd ever heard of—San Francisco, Algiers, Liverpool, Dublin, Prague, Hoboken, Glasgow, Winnipeg, Tunis, Marseille, Melbourne, Chicago. They came from the pockets and wallets of the men whom the newspapers were calling Nina Bonte's liberators.

Always Nina Bonte took in big lira notes and gave back little lira notes. And as the anasetta, vino and vermouth went down the soldiers' throats, the confusion of her big cash register grew and the stacks of money flooded out onto the counter beside her, even onto the floor. She stuffed it into bags, she made bundles of it with string, she crammed it in a strongbox. Always Nina Bonte's hands were full, always Nina was talking and grabbing, grabbing and talking, till soon she thought she must have every lira note, big and small, that could exist in all Rome.

At one o'clock Antonio the busboy closed one steel door all the way and the other steel door halfway, and then Nina Bonte and her two bartenders Constanzo and Roberto set about trying to persuade the soldiers to leave. *"Polizia militare!"* Nina said to them at first, confidentially, affecting good fellowship. And then getting excited and pointing to the AMGOT rules on the wall, she screamed: *"Polizia militare! Via! Tutto via! Polizia militare!"* When the last drunken liberator was persuaded out of Nina Bonte's bar, Antonio slammed and locked the second iron door and began wiping the sticky tables and stacking the chairs.

Nina did not move off her stool. She ran her fingers through her blond hair, her strong body resting now from the labor of money-making it had taken. There were dark patches of sweat under her arms and she breathed heavily. Small beads glistened on her upper lip.

The charwoman, a plump dark girl who always brought her baby along, came in, put her baby on a chair in the corner, and began to mop the floor. The bartenders wiped off the bottles and straightened them on the shelf behind the bar. Nina watched them out of tired eyes. She wanted to go home and lie down but she forced herself to sit here because she felt that no one could be trusted except herself. And of course her sister Teresa, who worked the five-to-seven evening shift. She would not have dreamed of letting anyone else handle all those precious lire: it was too easy for some to lose themselves between the customer's hand and the cash register.

She watched Antonio open the door for Teresa, and Teresa herself, stooping, come through into the dark bar from the glare of the street.

"Hot," Teresa said, and wiped her forehead with a handkerchief. "Were you busy?"

"Busy!" Nina Bonte laughed, and pulled her short skirt far above her knees to cool off. "Our liberators got as drunk as ever today."

Together they counted their take for the noon hour, 21,700 lire. They divided the money into groups of tens, fifties, hundreds, five hundreds and thousands. They handled it matter-of-factly—not excitedly as they had three years ago when the bar had first come into their possession. But they'd both really been much younger then—Nina out of Rome University only two years and with no experience in managing a bar, or managing anything. And Teresa, two years older, not knowing very much more—though she had worked a few months in their uncle's store as an assistant manager. But that was all changed. Now as they sat in their darkened bar side by side, these two were grown-up and wise. They looked a lot alike, both with short boxy bodies, strong legs and arms, large faces with bobbed hair, big eyes and mouths, and noses that had come down through the centuries to them: straight, ample noses starting right at the forehead. Only in temperament were they different: Teresa's two years seemed to give her a calm and easy-going quality that Nina lacked. Nina was a whirlwind behind the bar, suddenly irritated, suddenly excited, suddenly smiling. Teresa, in her turn, worked fast and furiously too, but she seemed to plow through the mad exchange of lira notes and hands grasping for drinks with a certain nonchalance. And yet it was Nina who did all the managing of the bar, who talked to the Allied and Italian tax collectors, who took care of the liquor buying. It was her nervous intelligence which had made the bar prosperous, her facility for picking up languages which had encouraged soldiers to stay longer and drink more.

Their endeavors had already paid off for Teresa to the tune of one architect, aged sixty-two, salary fifteen thousand lire a month, who had declared himself ardently in love and ready for matrimony. Nina Bonte herself did not have a *fidanzato*. Not any more, that is. The sparklers on her hand, she told her interested customers, were from a man who'd been a flier in the Italian air force and had been killed in Africa. Actually she did not know what had ever happened to him since he'd left Rome four years ago. Maybe some day he would turn up but she didn't really worry about it. The past was the past and she could let it alone. The important thing was making money while the making was good. While the liberators were in town.

Nina knew that her father, who had gone north with the Fascists, would have been proud of his two girls. He had never attended Rome University, but he too understood the nature of the world and the nature of the liberator. . . .

Finished with their money-counting, they put the taped bundles into their strongbox, waited while the last barman got into his coat and left, and then went out themselves, locking the door behind them. Walking fast on their short strong legs, they'd covered the seven blocks to their home before either had thought of anything to say.

As Nina Bonte ate, sitting at the table with her mother and Teresa, she looked at the fine white American sugar, the American bacon, the American salt and pepper, all of which she had bought on the black market from soldiers, and she felt a certain satisfaction in herself, for being smart enough to know how to make a lira when a lira was around.

Some day, she thought, eating her spaghetti, after the war is over I will retire. And travel places. Anywhere I want to go. Albania. Greece. Yugoslavia. I'll have money to spend, and there'll be no one to tell me the way to spend it. And I'll be generous then. It won't be necessary to save on anything.

She saw herself as a rather grand lady in expensive tailored clothes, made fascinating to men by her independence and her worldly experience. There would perhaps be a great industrialist . . . with a castle in the Alps which she would visit with him. Long motor cars. Dinner parties in the best restaurants. And she'd find it necessary to visit America and meet a young, promising designer of airplanes . . . or a movie star. She'd make money now and later anything could happen to her. Already she had eight hundred thousand lire, a sum which four years ago would have seemed sufficient for anything she could have dreamed about. But now, in inflated Rome, it was only a beginning, and she half hoped that the war in Italy would last another year. With the *Americani* spending like they were, in another year she would have a million and a half lire. She often told herself that Italy may have lost the war, but Nina Bonte was not going to lose it.

After dinner she lay down on the bed, her arms under her head and her legs drawn up. Teresa was washing her face, getting ready to leave for the bar.

"I'll come down tonight," Nina said. "I'm going to have my hair done this afternoon. I'll stop by."

But she went on lying there for an hour after Teresa had gone. She felt vaguely uneasy. Out in the city at this hour the girls of Rome were parading in the parks and streets, anxious about dinner, ready to make up to any soldier who would buy it for them. And the more hardened whores were sitting in the bars eyeing up the possible customers, their price of a thousand lire easy on their gaudy mouths. . . . Was she losing anything by working so hard? Were the girls who were walking in the park and meeting soldiers having more in their lives than she would ever have?

To drive the thoughts from her mind, she got up and combed her hair, washed, and put on another dress, a blue gingham that buttoned down the front. She noticed in the mirror the spiderweb wrinkles that had come at the corners of her eyes in the past year. These increased her feeling of uneasiness, and she went out of the room quickly, kissed her mother, and left the apartment.

Everywhere on the street were girls with soldiers. Well-dressed painted girls, who gazed up into the faces of their men. Nina Bonte thought of the American soldier she had known two months ago. A rather sissified, intellectual kid with glasses, who had come to the bar three days in a row and then finally got up courage to ask her to eat with him. They'd had dinner that evening, and next day she'd let him take her to his room. He had been a very shy, very gallant sort of fellow who had tried to give the matter of their lovemaking some kind of dignity by telling her that he was really very fond of her, and by recounting to her some of the things that had happened to him at Harvard, where he'd been a student in chemistry before the draft. When Nina told him that she was a college graduate, he'd become even more attentive. He'd seen just by looking at her that she was intelligent, he said. That was why he'd spoken to her in the first place. . . . She smiled, thinking of Sergeant Lester Hunt. She had only known him that one time, he'd been from Corsica on a five-day pass. Where was he now? Perhaps dead in Southern France. She didn't really care where Sergeant Hunt of the U.S. Army was now. But she couldn't help feeling restless and dissatisfied, wanting to do some of the things the pretty, carefree girls here on the street were doing. An American soldier would be best—some soldier who couldn't make any claim on her . . . some intelligent, clean soldier. Even someone like Sergeant Hunt.

She had her bobbed blond hair curled at a shop on Corso Umberto, and then, walking quickly as if there weren't a minute to lose, she headed for the Bar Nazionale.

The bar didn't seem so crowded this evening. She squeezed over to the cash register and sat down on a bench, swinging her short legs. "Did Alfredo do a good job?" She took out a mirror and looked at her hair.

"It looks very nice," Teresa said from behind the cash register.

Nina fixed a stray curl, then put away the mirror. Now she studied her nails. They were even and well polished. Tomorrow, she thought, I'll go have a sulphur bath. She had money, and she could afford it. She would stay young.

Somewhere to go tonight. After all, that was part of life too. She looked at the soldiers around her—most of them were drunk, they were disgusting. She especially hated the English. All of them seemed to have teeth missing in front, and they leered at you in such a knowing way. She would never have anything to do with an English soldier, she told herself. She liked the Americans better: they were like innocent children who threw their money around as if it were water.

And then she noticed those two at the bar. One of them a tall blond American soldier and the other shorter, stockier, with dark hair—talking earnestly together. Now they were buying another drink and saying something to Teresa, and she was laughing.

"But of course it's my sister," Teresa was saying. "She works in the afternoon and I work at night." She leaned over the bar and said to Nina, "They won't believe you're my sister."

The two soldiers turned to her. She laughed. "I thought we looked alike," she said in English.

"Oh," the dark soldier said, "you speak English."

"I speak five languages," Nina said. "French, English, Italian, Spanish . . . and German." She did not really speak Spanish, but she felt there was a good chance they didn't either.

"You're prepared to deal with practically any kind of soldier who comes along," the dark one said. "Did you work in the bar when the Germans were in town?"

"Yes, we've been here for three years," Nina answered.

"I've been here for three days," the dark soldier said. "We ought to compare notes."

"I've worked in the bar for three years," Nina told him. "I've lived in Rome all my life."

"Where are you from?" Teresa asked them in Italian.

"We're from San Cialo," the blond one said.

"Are you in the Air Corps?"

"Yeah."

"Rome is beautiful . . . with many art treasures, yes?" It was what Teresa said to all soldiers.

"We've seen too many picture postcards back in the States," the dark soldier answered in English. "We can't get worked up over the art treasures."

"You don't like Rome?" Nina asked, offended.

"We feel like we've come out of the Middle Ages," the dark soldier said. "We've lived the past eight months in San Cialo. We'd like any big city where things are happening. In San Cialo nothing happens. People promenade on the streets in the evening and go to church. They live in mud and have nothing. No woman dares speak to a man she's not engaged to. Of course we like Rome."

Nina looked at him curiously. He seemed to be challenging her. Every other soldier had told her he was very much impressed with Rome.

"Perhaps you don't know the significance of the things you see here," she said. "The historical background. Rome is the world's most important city."

There was sarcasm in his smile. "I won't list my college credits," he said. "What we're interested in is the Rome that's alive today. We're interested in what happens to a people that's lived under Fascism for twenty-two years and then finds itself more or less freed of the Fascists."

"We're not Fascists," Teresa burst in, not understanding what he'd said but hearing the word.

"Of course you're not," he said. "Nobody is nowadays in Rome."

Nina felt her face flush and she heard her voice come overloud: "You can't accuse us of being Fascists. We've had to make our living like everybody else. You Americans seem to think that everyone who has made a living under Fascism is a Fascist."

The soldier smiled at her excitement. "The Fascists had control of the educational system in Rome for twenty-two years," he said. "If they didn't make good Fascists out of you it wasn't their fault."

"I'm a graduate of the University of Rome," Nina told him, feeling annoyed with herself for wanting to impress him, "and the courses there were as impartial as any at your American schools."

"What did you study?" the blond fellow asked.

"Political Economy."

Both soldiers smiled. "Political Economy in Mussolini's University of Rome," the dark one said. "And it wasn't pro-Fascist?"

"No," Nina answered, really annoyed now. "We studied all governments."

"And I suppose you decided that Democracy was the hope of the world?"

Nina was too angry to answer. She got up and walked to the other end of the bar, as if she had something to do there. But then she came back and sat down.

"Don't get so excited," the dark one said, sitting down beside her. "You take an awful lot for granted. We didn't say you were Fascists. You brought that up yourself."

Nina could not help looking into his large face with its bright brown eyes. It was a face with a good deal of mischief and curiosity in it. She wondered who he was. He was certainly not like most of the others who came into her bar and agreed to everything and were more intent on getting drunk and having a woman than anything else. Or perhaps, she thought, she was interested in him because he seemed interested in her—"intellectually."

"What's your name?" she asked.

"My name is Joe," he said, "Joe Hammond. This is Burt Hunter."

Burt Hunter's long thin face was not a stupid one, either, she thought.

"What part of America do you come from?"

"He's from the west coast," Joe said, "I'm from Chicago."

"Oh, Chicago," she said, remembering the movies she'd seen.

"Yeah," he smiled, "Chicago. Where the streets ring with pistol shots twenty-four hours a day and all night long the police spend their time picking up the victims."

She looked at him seriously, not understanding his humor.

"I'm not a gangster myself," he went on, "I'm a newspaper man. But I'm proud to say that all my relatives are. Even my baby sister."

"You're joking now," Nina said. "But there *are* a lot of gangsters in Chicago, aren't there?"

He narrowed his eyes, she could not tell whether he was amused or not. "Let's not stop with gangsters," he said. "Let's run through the whole list of Italian truisms about Americans. A: All Americans are rich. B: Americans don't get married, or if they do they get divorced right away. C: Americans are just simple children who know nothing about art, music, or any of the fancy things. D: Americans spend all their time drinking, yachting, and riding in long motor cars."

Nina looked at him, wondering what he was driving at. It was true, she had believed more or less those things—not put so bluntly perhaps. But in general, all Americans *were* rich—they didn't know what it was to have to be poor like poor Italy. They didn't know what the problems of real life were. All they could do was make money.

"It is true," she said. "I know you joke, but it is true that Americans are not poor like so many in Italy are."

Both of them were looking at her, laughing. Joe took her hand and squeezed it. She glanced down at their hands together and said, "Yes, but you're all the same about holding hands."

When time came for the bar to close, at seven, the two just said good-bye and left. They did not even hint they wanted her to go with them.

She felt vaguely irritated. As she helped Teresa straighten out the cash register she tried to remember what it had been about them that had irritated her so much. And then she remembered—it had been his holding her hand, almost making love to her, and at the same time laughing at everything she said.

But Nina Bonte's curiosity about anybody was limited to the impressions of a moment, and when she got up the next morning it was with the hard simple thought that at ten o'clock she would go down to her bar and prepare for another big day of money-making.

At eleven o'clock the iron doors were opened and in came the liberators of Rome, eager and thirsty. And behind the bar Nina, who had not lost the war, waited for them, her left hand resting on the cash register, her legs crossed, her skirt crawling a little above the knee. The pounding of Nina's heart increased with the number of soldiers demanding drinks at her bar—she was in no mood to be kidded when the voice at her elbow said: "Trouble with Americans is that we've never been told that Fascism is just an extreme form of capitalism, just another way for the few to make more money at the expense of the majority."

She looked up into Joe's big smiling face.

"We all live as we have to," she said. "If it is necessary to be a Fascist to live, then I'll be one."

"I know," Joe said, sipping his glass of anasetta. "If kicking the Jews, the Ethiopians, the Spanish Republicans, the Italian Socialists pays, a lot of people will do it."

"You have no right to talk to me like that," she told him. "You know nothing of me, my family, or what I've been or done. You have no right to criticize me. I'm working hard now and making all the money I can so that some day I can live the kind of life I want to live."

"And what kind of life is that?"

"I want to have money to travel and to live so I won't have to be stingy or deny myself anything. Now is the time to make money in Rome, and I'm going to make it."

"I don't doubt it. You must be very busy."

"I am busy," Nina Bonte said, the bartenders thrusting lira notes toward her which she didn't notice. And then she felt a need to explain herself to him. What sort of person did he think she was?

"I do not really like to work so hard and shout at everyone," Nina said. "I am really lazy. I like to lie in the sun and let life go by."

"You mean making money is just a bad habit with you?" His lips curled upward though she was not sure he was smiling.

But the bartenders were waving money in her face and she had to quit the conversation and make change for five minutes. Then she looked back at him. "You don't understand me," she told him. "You don't understand the kind of times we're living in." She glimpsed herself momentarily as a person pleading that she too was a human being, a young girl, not a hard-headed Fascist businesswoman. To change the conversation she asked, "Where's your blond friend today?"

"He wanted to sketch an Italian selling fruit," Joe said, "and I wanted to come over here to see you. So we compromised—each did what he wanted."

She was flattered, but she tried to control her smile. "And why should you want to see me?" she asked. "You don't seem to approve of me."

"You're alive," Joe said. "I approve of everything that's alive."

"I don't understand what you mean."

"I'm not sure I do either. But that's the way I feel."

Again there was the rush of lira notes and she had to turn away from him. She looked wildly around the crowded bar—a madhouse of hoarse laughter, loud talk, glasses and bottles clinking. She had the desperate feeling that unless she screamed at the waiters and bartenders she'd be losing money, and she wondered why she was neglecting this to talk to an American Army private who evidently didn't approve of her to begin with.

But she looked back at him anyhow, and he said, "I want to take you to lunch. What time are you through here, one o'clock?"

She was going to refuse him, believing it would be a kind of moral victory to turn down a four hundred lire dinner when every other girl in town was selling her body for one. But as suddenly she changed her mind. Who did he think she was, anyhow? She would show him that she was a girl too, not the kind of person he thought she was. She had been to college, she could hold up her end with him. She would eat his four hundred lire dinner, too, and give him nothing for it. That would be victory enough.

The electricity was off in Rome and they sat over in the dark corner of the restaurant with just a candle burning on their table. Nina Bonte found herself hungrier than she'd thought, and attacked her steak avidly.

Afterward they drank wine and smoked.

And always she felt those bright curious eyes of his on her, as if there were many questions he wanted to ask her that he did not know how to phrase. He'd surprised her by not making love to her, by not even mentioning love as a personal thing that might be possible between the two of them . . . for a day or a week, the schedule love kept now in Rome. He wanted to talk about her—the kind of kid she'd been, the things she'd thought, the schools she'd gone to. He listened almost eagerly to everything she said, as if it were very important. She felt flattered, but she could not understand him. Didn't he want what all the other Americans wanted who came to Rome on furlough—a woman, a day or two rescued out of the drab life of a solider?

Just when she was sure that he didn't, he ran his fingers through her hair and said, "Come on to my room. I want to make love to you, Nina Bonte."

They went up the dark stairway of the apartment house hand in hand and stopped at the big oak door with the name MARIO VALSETTI on it. They waited as footsteps from far back in the apartment came closer.

Nina hid so that the person opening the door could not see her. "Tell them to go into another room," she said.

Joe did, and then she followed him through a dining room, down a little hall, and into the bedroom.

He stood looking at her now, his hands on her shoulders.

"Nina Bonte," he said, laughing. "So you weren't really married to your cash register after all."

"It's hot," she said. She began to undress.

"Now," said Nina Bonte, smoking a cigarette as she lay beside him on the bed, "now do you think I'm a Fascist money-greedy person who hates Americans?"

He looked at her and laughed. "Fascism is just a convenient way for some people to get more of the world's goods than the majority." He put his hand on her arm. "You know, most Americans think of Italians with as much innocence as Italians think of Americans. They believed a year ago that Italians lived and died by the word of Mussolini. They thought that all Italians looked alike—small and dark, with large noses and black eyes—thought alike, did alike. They could never see them in terms of people who liked to eat, sleep, work, make love. I don't imagine you ever really believed that Americans were human beings either. That there are Fascists, Democrats, Communists and Anarchists in America, just as there are in Italy. . . . Look, Nina, I don't think you're a Fascist as most people think of a Fascist—somebody with his hand stuck up in the air threatening the rest of the world with war and slavery. But you know, I think you might have helped the cause of Fascism by taking as much personal advantage of it as you could. And you had the same excuse that the exploiters under any system have—that it's necessary to take care of yourself, or nobody else will."

She lay there in the room of this man who dared say things like this to her, burning with anger. She smashed the cigarette in the little dish beside the bed and jumped up. She began to dress, slipping into her silk pants, her dress, her sandals, standing before the mirror and combing her hair furiously, containing herself, knowing that if she spoke she would begin to scream things at him that would make her ridiculous. Maybe he was Jewish, she thought. How did she know with whom she was dealing? What a fool she was. And to think that after she had slept with him he could still talk like this to her.

He got up too. He dressed easily, still looking at her all the time.

She picked up her bag and went to the door. She wasn't even going to say goodbye to him.

"Wait a minute, Nina," Joe said.

She turned. He still seemed to be amused at her, not angry at all. He was putting on his shoe, and his forehead was wrinkled as he looked up.

"I'll walk back across town with you, if you'll just wait a minute."

"I'm not waiting." She should not even have stopped when he spoke. "I think I know your opinion of me."

"Don't be too sure about that, Nina—"

But before he could speak again she opened the door and was going back through the dining room, out into the hall, down the steps.

Why had she gone with him in the first place? He had made her feel as though she wanted to prove something to him. And she had tried to prove it by sleeping with him. Why had she needed to prove anything to an American soldier? Of course, she knew their opinion of the Italians. All they wanted to do was bleed the poor Italians. And they were all rich, they couldn't understand an Italian! Yes, he thought he was so superior. He should talk about Italy, he should criticize the Duce and the great things the Duce had wanted to do for Italy. Let him go back to his country of gangsters and live off the fat of the land. Italy had more cultural achievements than the Americans could ever hope for—one of the oldest and richest civilizations in the world. And he should talk like that—he dared talk like that to her!

By the time she'd arrived at the bar she'd sworn to herself never to have anything more to do with an American soldier. Any girl who does, she thought, is a traitor to her country.

And she would work at her bar and make enough money to impress even him, rich as he probably was.

She went into the crowded bar and sat down on the bench beside Teresa.

"You look upset," Teresa said. "Are you feeling well?"

"I'm all right," Nina said. "It's hot. I've been walking too fast. Give me a glass of lemonade."

She saw him the moment he came in next day at eleven thirty, him and his tall blond friend. She immediately became very busy making change.

But he came on over and said, "*Ciao,* Nina."

"Ciao," she said coldly, looking through him with icy eyes.

He crowded around to the side of the bar, where he could be closer to her. "You're really angry, aren't you, Nina?"

"I'm very busy," she said. "I can't afford to neglect my business to talk to you."

"I thought you were an intellectual, Nina. I thought you could look at things objectively."

She did not answer.

"Did I describe Fascists too well?" he asked. "Is that why you got mad?"

"Please go away," she said. "Please do not disturb me. I am busy making money. I am busy making all the money that I can, so that I will not have to sit behind a counter waiting on . . . on you rich Americans the rest of my life."

"Are you going to marry your cash register?" he asked her. "Shall I address you in the future as Signora National Cashregister?"

She did not say anything more to him, and he stood there silently for what seemed a long time.

Then he said, "I didn't want to hurt your feelings, Nina Bonte. But then, I didn't think that talking about important questions like Fascism could hurt your feelings."

She didn't answer. But she began to wonder if she had been foolish.

He had been sweet to her in the room yesterday. Making love to her he had not been contemptuous, she had liked him then. . . .

"I've got to go now," Joe said. "The thing is, Nina, my intellectual convictions don't make me hate individuals. There is always a lot to like in any individual." He reached out and took her hand—squeezed it, but she didn't return the pressure. "We've got to go now," he said. "Don't be angry. I really like you a lot."

Burt said goodbye to her too. She watched them go out and down the street.

She felt confused and angry, not at Giuseppe any longer, but at the world in general, the times she lived in, the crazy atmosphere the war had created which suddenly she felt had made her lose the whole perspective of her life. What *did* she want? This bar, money, travel? All of it seemed empty now. Even the prospect of a rich marriage seemed not even worth hoping for. The days that had been fierce affairs of money-making appeared empty things. What did she, Nina Bonte, want?

But the bartenders were holding out lira notes for her, and across the room the wholesale liquor dealer was waiting to talk to her. She made the change swiftly and motioned him over.

"I can only let you have half of your order," he told her.

"Why?" she said. "I must have it all—I can sell it all. Where will the profit on this bar come from?"

"I'm very sorry," he said, looking into a small black notebook to convince her. "I would do it if I could, but we don't have it. You know what deliveries are."

"All right," she said. "Just give me all you can."

She would have to find another dealer. It would mean a loss if she didn't have the liquor to sell. What would happen if she couldn't keep the bar open? What would happen to her if she no longer had this place to come to every day?

That American could say what he liked, this life was superior to any other that had been offered her. She felt suddenly that she had better begin holding tighter to what she had. Before someone took it away from her. Yes, she would travel some day—and if she didn't she would still be better off than most—than the girls who had to walk the streets of Rome in order to eat. She would make money, and the rest of the world could go to hell for all she cared.

She shouted at Antonio to wipe off a table, she pointed out a soldier waving his hand to a bartender, she grabbed big lira notes and gave smaller ones back for them, she got off her stool and served drinks herself when demands got too great.

And by the time Teresa came in at one-thirty she was exhausted and her heart pounded in her throat.

But she'd recovered from her mood—the exertions had really made her rather happy. Money-making was a satisfying thing, she thought back at home, resting on her bed. It was the most satisfying thing that she did.

She slept for a couple of hours. When she awoke, she felt tired and uneasy, not wanting to get up.

She remembered the American soldier Joe and tried to recall some of the things he'd said. But she had forgotten everything. It seemed to her, lying there in her room with the shades drawn, that he had wanted to say something important to her but had not known how to say it. The curious, interested look on his face came back to her. How anxious he had been to know her. She couldn't believe that he had only wanted to take her to bed. He had wanted something else of her—something she had perhaps refused to give him.

But it was all too confusing, too vague. . . . She herself was confused and vague. It was only possible to work hard and to make money. And hope that some day she would get what she wanted, if ever she knew what it was.

She got up and washed her face in cold water. She did not think of the soldier again. She thought of where she could buy additional quantities of liquor to sell to her thirsty liberators.

V. Pfc Joe Hammond

"All right, sinner, go on in."

Pfc Joe Hammond, sinner, looked at the green lightbulb above the door and then went inside, leaving Burt on the street. He had never been in one of these before though the army, with a million lectures and movies and posters, had made him understand the general procedure. It was a dismal poorly-lighted room with open booths, five on each side, stretching all the way to the rear. The front half was empty and here two civilian attendants were sitting at a table talking. The small sandy-haired one got up.

"You want a pro?" he asked from behind his thick-lensed glasses.

"Yeah," Joe answered.

He picked up a paper with white salve on it, a spatula with a glob of soap-paste, and some paper towels. He led Joe into one of the open booths. "Urinate first," he said, and left.

Joe read the directions on the wall above the little wash basin.

REMOVE PANTS AND UNDERWEAR

URINATE

WASH PRIVATES THOROUGHLY WITH SOAP & WATER

RINSE OFF ALL SOAP

INJECT BROWN LIQUID INTO END OF PENIS AND HOLD FOR 3 MINUTES

RUB WHITE SALVE WELL INTO PENIS, PUBIC HAIRS AND INSIDE OF THIGHS FOR 5 MINUTES

WRAP PENIS IN PAPER TOWEL

AVOID URINATING FOR 4 HOURS

Joe dropped his pants and started in. He looked at the limp, foolish symbol of the thing which involved so many of Rome's efforts. But you pay for it, he thought, if you get it in the wrong place. He wondered whether Nina Bonte could have been the wrong place, and cursed himself suddenly for being so stupid as not to have worn a condom. But even now he felt sure about her, the cynic always present in him laughing at that sureness. . . .

Rubbing in the white salve, he thought about Sam Dinos back at camp who had served twelve years in the army, most of them at Panama, and who boasted about taking pros even when he hadn't had a girl—who swore he loved to take em. . . .

"Was she a hot piece?"

Joe looked up. It was a Limey sergeant, standing in the opposite booth massaging himself, his pants heaped at his feet. He had a sly bony face, all nose, and his eyes showed he was still a little drunk.

"I thought I'd gotten tangled up with a meat grinder," Joe said.

The sergeant said heh-heh. "Same here, got drunk this morning and ended up in a house taking on three of em. Bloody good town for pussy, eh?"

"I'll know in five days," Joe said, and the sergeant favored him with another heh-heh.

"How are you getting along?" the sandy-haired attendant asked, looking down at Joe's hand rubbing in the salve. There was intelligence in the puffy face and magnified eyes.

"Fine," Joe said. "You speak English all right, don't you."

"Yes. I am not Italian, you know. I am Polish. I am a doctor. I was here in Italy when the war began and the Italians imprisoned me. The English liberated me and I enlisted in their army and served with them here in Italy for eight months. Now I'm a civilian again. This is the only kind of job I could get."

"You're important to me," Joe said.

The little Pole smiled, showing two teeth missing. "Yes, you wouldn't want to get syphilis," he smiled. "But with the new cure it isn't too bad. Penicillin. You Americans gave us syphilis originally and now five hundred years later you have pardoned yourselves with a cure." There was a touch of sarcasm. "Very just, very just."

Before Joe could answer he had turned and gone away.

Joe wrapped the towel around his penis as instructed, pulled up his clothing and buttoned it, washed his hands, put on his cap, and left the booth. The Pole was talking to his Italian assistant and didn't answer Joe's so-long.

Going out the door Joe made way for three Negro GIs who were singing "Hold That Tiger" and laughing at each other between choruses in high yelps.

Burt was waiting for him down at the corner. He held a red carnation in his hand.

"Here, my friend," he said. "Here, I give you back your lost virginity, in essence if not in fact."

Joe took the flower and smelled it and felt lousier than he would have admitted.

"Is it too early to get a drink?" he asked.

VI. Gianna Verdetta

EVERY night around seven in that mad unhappy September of 1944, the lust that had been dormant all day, hiding away from the sun in the secret places of the great city, seemed to ooze forth. From doors and windows it came, from the Colosseum where in the lions' caves whores waited for what their pimps would bring them, from the crumbling palaces of the Caesars where girls crept with their soldiers, from the ground of the big parks where couples would lie tonight. A gray warm haze descended over Rome like a perfumed veil, and through it hard and undeniable punched the urgent red fist of desire. Those who felt it most were the soldiers who filled up the hotels and rest camps in the town—soldiers slightly berserk with the thrill of their seven-day furloughs and five-day passes from the muddy villages and blood-soaked mountains of Italy, guys goofy with the idea of finding a modern undamaged city again complete with women who seemed clean and obtainable, who smiled at you when you spoke, who came to you like you came to them, urgent and slightly mad with the war. Rome, with its quiet Tiber cutting the town, its brooding ruins like old chancre scars on a painted modern body, its ancient acceptance of what would inevitably come, was like a grand old whore itself, warm in September, ready to give soldiers far from home what they needed.

Who were the whores of Rome? They were as dissimilar as war could make women—some old and eager and smart for the thousand lira note, some so young and sad that even the lusty evening air seemed to hurt them, even the eyes of the obscene crowds of soldiers who paraded the streets seeking them out seemed to spoil them again.

There were hundreds like this and she was one of them—never accepting herself for what she was, slipping along through the crowded streets to the park to pick up her soldier for the evening, hoping that somehow her days and nights would be given some kind of miraculous dignity out of all the insults the city prepared for her. She hurried up Via del Tritone now, a slim tall girl in a white dress with a dark blue belt around the waist. Few soldiers on the street called to her. She moved along quickly, she did not beckon them with the usual mascaraed eyes and bloody lips. Her face was not beautiful: perhaps the eyes were not large enough, the nose too long and slightly arched, the mouth not full enough unrouged, and the whole effect elongated—a Modigliani woman. And yet in the face of Gianna Verdetta there was something simple and elegant and sad, as if her features had been purified through fifty generations from the earliest days of her people.

Gianna Verdetta did not walk or look like a Rome whore, but that is what she was.

Somehow tonight she felt it more than ever before. Perhaps it was only the first cool hints of approaching fall in the air. How well she remembered fall in Livorno two years ago, before the war had been brought to Italy. That seemed now like an impossible part of the past she would never be able to regain. Her father and brothers had all been gone, but her mother and two younger sisters, Maria and Iva, had still been there, and they had lived in their house, eating together and knowing each other. And there had been a boy, Leo, a year younger than Gianna, who would come to the house looking clean-washed and embarrassed, standing with his cap in his hand while she helped her mother prepare supper, sometimes sitting with her and holding her hand furtively when her mother's back was turned. To think that she had been young once, and now she was twenty and young no longer. She had fled to Rome when the guns had come close to Livorno. Her mother had not wanted her to go, but she had gone anyhow, thinking that perhaps in Rome there would be work for her—she could sell in the stores, or wait tables in a restaurant. But she had found work only for a few weeks, clerking in a shop on Via Nazionale and earning almost nothing. She had found a room with a family who lived in an apartment house near the Piazza Venezia—an elderly man and his young wife and their child, a boy thirteen. They had been good to her, they had not pressed her too much for rent on penniless days. The Americans had methodically knocked out all the city's communications and the Germans had methodically collected and eaten all the food in the city—and Gianna Verdetta had methodically grown thinner and thinner those months before Rome was finally conquered. She had accepted her starvation as an inevitable thing, wishing always that the war would end, wishing that she could go home again, yet not really believing that anything so good would ever come true.

And when the American tanks had shoved into Rome, into the great starving city, Gianna Verdetta had done what three hundred thousand other Rome girls who were starving did—she let the hearty well-fed Americans pick her up and feed her and make love to her. July and August—those were wild months of love-making for the girls of Rome, and of eating too. It was as if Rome's women and their conquerors were mutually eager to end the incomprehensible war by mating hungrily in all the furnished rooms and hotels of the city. And the girls put down their five hundred lira dinners adroitly in the intervals.

Now it was another day in Gianna Verdetta's life. Seven o'clock in the evening but she'd eaten nothing since this morning—and then only some American sausages out of a can, the same sausages she'd been eating and learning to hate since the Allies had come. She had read a love story in her room in the morning, and in the afternoon she'd gone to a movie alone with some of the money a soldier had given her yesterday. She was hungry now, so hungry she did not think she could live another night without a full meal, and she was walking quickly up the hill to the park, feeling in her bones that she was foolish, that it was too late for the restaurants to be open, that she had better go back to her room and eat more out of the unfinished can, and sleep, and tomorrow go out to the city and give herself to it for a warm meal and whatever additional generosity prompted the conqueror.

But really she did not want to go back to that room, really she did not want to. She was lonely and lost, her chest filled with such sadness that she felt slightly ill, an inexplicable need burning in her to throw herself to the city's men and forget her name, her birthplace, her hunger.

No one took Gianna Verdetta's arm on the winding street to the park. One or two soldiers spoke, but she only smiled slightly and went straight on. She could not bring herself to encourage them more. All around her other, flashier girls, who gave back snappy answers when approached, were joining soldiers, their soft laughter helping to fill the hollow bowl of the city which at this hour seemed to have become completely feminine, the smell and sound of women everywhere.

She went past the line of carriages waiting to take soldiers and their pick-ups down the avenue to the hotels, and through the arch of the old Roman Wall. The park was bustling with activity. She heard a jazz band playing in the American Enlisted Men's Club, drowning out the orchestra in the Italian outdoor theater behind it. Vendors of postcards and trinkets lined the street up to the Club, and everywhere she looked were American soldiers—talking in groups, eyeing girls, walking with their pick-ups toward more secluded spots, even buying postcards from the vendors who blocked their way.

She cut left around the Red Cross, and down the tree-lined street, by the benches filled with soldiers. She walked slowly and evenly, not looking around, wanting to be spoken to yet almost afraid that someone would dare.

But though their hungry eyes looked, still no one talked to her. She began to feel humiliated, as though she were offering herself and being rejected. She turned left, off the main promenade, up a street where most of the benches were empty and where only one couple, seeking solitude, walked close together. She went more slowly now, liking the absence of people, suddenly not caring if she ate or not tonight, not caring if anybody spoke to her. Her legs ached, her stomach knotted inside her, feeding on itself. Her head felt light and there was a moment of terrible dizziness. But she made two hard fists of her hands, she kept walking and she didn't faint.

She came to a corner and stopped, not knowing whether to turn back or go deeper into the park. She had been standing there for what seemed a long time, staring into the trees, when she noticed that on a bench in the shadows only fifteen feet away from her two American soldiers were sitting, watching her. One of them was a short, dark fellow, the other was tall, blond, thin. She felt suddenly ashamed of herself, hoping they didn't think she'd been waiting for them to notice her, and she hurried on. But from the corner of her eye she saw one had gotten up. "Wait a minute, signorina." She kept on walking, forgetting even to smile.

When his hand touched hers, she looked up into the dark one's broad face.

"Hello," he said.

She smiled, shy under his curious eyes.

"Permission to walk with you, signorina?" he said in Italian.

"If you wish."

They walked on a little way, and then he took her arm. "What's your name?" he asked. "Maria?"

She shook her head, smiling. All Americans seemed to think your name was Maria. "Gianna," she said. "What is your name?"

"Giuseppe."

He took her hand and his fingers were cold and she felt that he was much shyer than he'd at first seemed. They did not say anything for a long time.

"Where are you going, Gianna?" he asked finally.

She stopped. "This way." She turned him around, led him back toward the park entrance. The blond fellow was still sitting on the bench as they passed. "Your friend?" Gianna asked.

"Yeah."

"He will find a girl too?"

"Maybe."

Now they were going back along the crowded promenade, past the same soldiers who before had not spoken to Gianna, she'd walked so fast. Giuseppe's cold hand had grown warm in hers, and she returned his pressure. How different it was to walk past men when you were with a man.

"You haven't eaten, have you?" he asked.

"No."

"We'll eat."

"It's late," she said. "I don't think there will be a place."

"We'll try."

In the open carriage going down the hill it began to rain and Giuseppe put the top up. She was grateful for that, it hid her so much better. What if Signora Aldini should see her like this? Or Signo? Or their son? They didn't know what she was doing, she had been careful to come home every evening at ten and go to her room. A terrible shame smothered her for being here with a soldier she didn't even know, for going with him to do what everyone who saw her knew she would do. For one moment she felt like jumping out of the carriage and running away from him—from her life. Just to be back in her room, nobody again. It would be better for her to die there, to starve to death, rather than to do this. . . . She bent over, as if she were going to be sick, and covered her face with both her hands.

Giuseppe touched her arm, tried to look into her face.

"What is it, Gianna? Are you ill?" he asked.

"Nothing," she whispered through her fingers.

"Are you sad?"

"This is my neighborhood," she said. "I do not want anyone to see me."

When they got to the bridge over the Tiber, she raised her head again. She saw then how serious and concerned he was, his big face sad, his deep eyes staring at her. He looked away and took her hand.

"I'm sorry," he said. "Soldiers are no good, are they. Excuse me for being a soldier, Gianna."

They got out of the carriage in front of a restaurant. But it was closed.

"There's another in the vicinity," Giuseppe said.

They found it finally, but it too was closed. They stood in the purple evening, close together. The rain had stopped, it was getting cool. She shivered and he put his arm around her.

"Do you know a restaurant?" he asked.

"They will all be closed," she said. "They all close at seven-thirty."

"It's necessary for you to eat."

They began to walk, not knowing what else to do. Her hunger made her faint but strangely lightfooted. She felt only melancholy now, the way this time of evening always made her feel.

They came on a sidewalk café beside the river, but all the tables were taken. They went inside. It was dark there, not even candles burning. They sank down side by side on a lounge.

Giuseppe asked the waiter for food, but the place didn't serve food. They nibbled little cakes and drank tart berry juice. Most of the patrons were elderly Italian couples talking in low voices. No other soldiers. Guilt for being here with him took hold of her. Surely they were all looking at her, judging her.

He clasped her hand where it lay on the couch near him. "I'm sorry we couldn't find a place to eat," he said.

She didn't answer. She was dead. What difference did food or anything else in the world make? She glanced at him once—but he too was silent, studying the men at the bar.

"I'm sorry about everything," he said finally in a voice so low she could hardly hear. His eyes burned, there was no smile on his face now. "It's all a little rotten, isn't it?"

"What?" she asked.

"The city. The city and the war and what is happening to people everywhere."

She didn't answer but she looked into his face.

"Who are you, Gianna Verdetta?" he asked.

She did not understand.

"A Rome girl? Nobody?"

"I'm from Livorno," Gianna said, almost defensively. "I've been in Rome for nearly a year." But his interested face made her want to talk more. She leaned toward him. "I hate this city," she said suddenly. "When will the war be over?"

"Are you going back to Livorno then?"

"Yes," she said. "I'm going back." She stared past him. "I have a *fidanzato* there." She did not think, for a moment, how foolish it was to call Leo her *fidanzato*. She had a picture of him as he'd stood four years ago, cap in hand, looking embarrassed and awkward in her mother's kitchen. That memory of him seemed like the sweetest and most precious thing in her whole life.

"I hope you get there," Giuseppe said. "I hope you get away from here. I hope you are as beautiful then as you are now."

"I'm not beautiful," she said. "I'm ugly."

"You are beautiful." He said it with finality, as if it were a thing she could not have any opinion on.

They listened to the clop-clop of a carriage going by outside, and a girl laughing on the street.

"Excuse me for being a soldier," Giuseppe said. "Excuse me for having to be someone you are ashamed to be with. . . . I wish I could tell you how I feel about you and this city. The first day I got here, four days ago, I was happy, mad, in love with the city. I hurried up one street and down another. It's been a whole year since I've seen a great city. Where people seemed alive. Where girls were beautiful and where you could speak to them." He surprised her by a sudden short laugh. "But tonight I know the city," he said. "I know how rotten it is. The saddest city in the world. At first it was a kind of paradise to see all of Rome's beautiful women walking the streets wanting to be picked up for the price of a meal. It was good to be a soldier hungry for women and for love and to come to Rome on furlough. It would go on being good if you did not begin to know and understand each girl individually. A person, lost in the war. Do you know what I mean?"

She didn't nod or answer, she only stared at him.

"The rotten things it is necessary to see," he said. "Today in the park I saw a woman with a small baby. She let herself be picked up by three soldiers. She went with them."

"With a small baby?"

"Yeah. . . . Maybe she wanted to feed the baby."

They were staring into each other's eyes. All the melancholy of Rome seemed to rush in on them. A great lump had grown in Gianna's throat.

He leaned nearer to her, his face so close it seemed unbelievably huge. "This is a mad thing to say," he said, "and you will not believe me."

"What?"

"I think you are very beautiful, Gianna. I love you very much right now."

Two hot tears ran down her cheeks and she tried to look away, to hide them. But finally she had to fumble in her purse for her handkerchief.

They sat without speaking, their hands clutched together. The café was almost empty now, and somehow the terrible melancholy that had possessed her was disappearing. A sweet, listless sadness pervaded her body. Now she did not resent anything that had ever happened to her. Sitting here with him, she suddenly did not mind being a girl in Rome who walked the streets for her meals. Somehow she'd been dignified, become part of a tragedy greater than herself. His words had given her a picture of Gianna Verdetta that did not damn her, as she had always damned herself, but made her feel closer to the whole drama of the city tonight. She felt grateful to him, but no words would come to her mouth. She could only sit staring into his eyes.

He turned a spoon over and over between his fingers. At last he took his eyes from hers and gazed at the table.

"It's getting late," she told him. "I can only stay with you till nine-thirty."

Without looking up he said, 'If you don't want to come to my room with me you don't have to."

The waiter brought his change. There were three hundred lira notes and some smaller ones. He didn't count it, he folded it into a little package. Then holding it under the table, he slipped it into her hand.

"Eat tomorrow," he said, not looking at her, as if he were ashamed to give it to her.

She held it in her hand a moment, confused at all he said and did, before she put it in her purse.

"We can sit here and talk," he said. "And then I'll take you to your house."

"I want to go with you," she said.

He went on looking at the tablecloth and she said again, "I want to go to your room with you."

He looked up at her and he was smiling now, as if her words had made all his melancholy evaporate. He kissed her lightly on the mouth and got up, squeezing her hand. "Then let's go quickly, Gianna."

It was dark in the streets and they walked fast. Walking, Gianna felt that something miraculous had happened since dark had come. The city out there beyond the river had grown huge in the night, a thing alive in itself, brutal and powerful, ready to swallow her up if she let go his hand. She walked closer to him and he looked at her and smiled and kissed her cheek, leaving the cool shape of his lips there.

"Look at the moon," she said suddenly, pointing. They both laughed at the moon. It was almost as if it belonged to them, a personal moon. Her own laugh sounded strange to her—how long had it been since she'd laughed? The earth had become intimate, as in her childhood. Now everything had something to do with her, her life was connected with everything. Was it possible that some people were always as happy as this?

They went through the entrance-way of an apartment house, across a courtyard, and up dark steps, feeling their way. He stopped, struck a match. MARIO VALSETTI, the nameplate said. The match went out and he knocked. No sound. He knocked again. He tried the door.

"They've never been out before," he said. "They might be sleeping."

He knocked louder.

"Wait here," he said. "I'll go down and see the janitor. Maybe he has a key."

The moment he left her she began to feel the evil emptiness of herself creeping back, her guilt in what she was doing filling her with self-contempt. Prostitute! she thought. . . . But he was coming back up the steps—what if he had not gotten the key? He *had* to have the key, she did want to go with him.

"The janitor says he has no key. He told me the Valsettis ought to be back soon."

Time slowed as they waited with locked hands. Perhaps they stood there for half an hour. The hunger she had known before she'd met him came back more acute than ever. She would die if she didn't eat. The smell of the American sausages in her room stung her nostrils—if only she could have one sausage to eat, just one of the sausages she hated!

"Giuseppe."

He tightened his arm about her.

"Giuseppe, I am very hungry."

"I know."

"I could be back in forty-five minutes. I could go home and eat and come back to you."

"Will you come back?"

"I'll come back. I swear I will."

She kissed him very hard. He said the number of the house in her ear, and she repeated it, telling him she wouldn't forget. She kissed him for the last time and started down the stairs.

But at the bottom she turned. "I'll come back."

Rain splashed on her face as she went across the courtyard and out into the street. She began to walk faster, but the faster she walked the harder the rain seemed to come. Her dress clung to her body and her soaked sandals made a queer squashing sound as they beat on the pavement.

She ran across the Tiber bridge, stopped for a moment under a fruit-seller's umbrella on the other side, dashed into the rain again. Signora Aldini cried out when she opened the door.

"You must change your clothes right away." Her hands were clasped before her, two round eyes stared out of her head. "This is weather to catch cold in, Gianna."

"Yes," Gianna said, and hurried into her room. Stripped quickly and wiped her body with a towel. Her teeth chattered and her hands were blue with cold. She sneezed—a great pulse beat in her head, goose-pimples covered her legs.

She wasn't hungry now. She felt that the sight of the sausages would make her vomit. She blew out the candle and climbed into bed. She lay there shivering, her bones aching. Bright reds and yellows flared before her eyes.

But now she was hot. Fire swept her body—she flung all the covers away, lay naked. She coughed, got up and drank some water thinking it would cool her. She washed her face, climbed back into bed with the washcloth on her forehead.

This room had become detached from the house. It was rocking and bouncing, floating out over the great evil city of Rome. She saw that city now: an oozing swamp of filth and decay, crocodile snouts poking out everywhere. Help me! Soldiers were around her bed, they were laughing and shouting, pulling at her arms, their stinking breath scorched her face. Despoiled, choked, torn apart—she flung out her arms and legs and screamed: "Go away! Go away!"

The door opened, a candle came into the room. "Is anything the matter, Gianna?" With all her will she held herself quiet as Signora Aldini's kind hands tucked the blankets under her chin.

Alone again, her stomach wrenched up out of her and flung her to the side of the bed. She felt that blood not perspiration bathed her face. Blood! Her ears banged with blood, her throat choked. "Leo!" she said. He held his cap in his hand, looking down—but no, it was an American soldier's cap. Giuseppe's face looked up at her. "Then it was you all the time . . . and to think I didn't know!"

VII. Pfc Joe Hammond

Piazza Cavour was blacked out, but standing in front of their apartment house entrance they could feel the people hurrying by worried that the rain would start again. They could not make out features, they could only hear the low voices, smell the perfume women trailed behind them.

"It was locked when you got here with the girl?" Burt asked.

"Yeah."

"And you been waiting all this time . . . two hours?"

"I don't want to talk about it. Let's walk."

They crossed through the little park. Everything was fresh from the rain. They took the street alongside the Palace of Justice, then crossed one of the Tiber bridges, stopping on the other side to buy a white flower apiece from a man with a cartful.

"Flowers are all I want to remember about Rome," Joe said, sticking his in his pocket buttonhole.

Burt looked at him, interested. "You're fed up with it, eh? You and that girl didn't get along so well?"

"I don't want to talk about it. What did you do?"

"I walked down to Via Tritone. Damn near got crushed by all the girls and GI's doing everything but copulating on the street. Went into a bar and had an anasetta." He thought a minute. "I saw something interesting, y' know. There was a blond in the bar, very neat, very nicely dressed. Drinking alone. It was obvious she was out to pick something up. But still you felt she was all right. Too bad you weren't there—you seem to be able to sympathize with that type. She had a nice solid amused look on her face. Then without any warning some drunken infantryman came in and marched over to her table and says: 'Hello, blondie, you wanta fuck?"

"Just like that?" Joe said.

"Just like that," Burt said. "He stood there swaying in front of her saying 'I ain't got no time to waste on you baby, either you fuck or you don't. So make up your mind.' There were some Italians in the place and they were angry but didn't do anything. The bartender told her 'Why don't you hit him?' But she didn't."

"What did she do?" Joe asked.

"She was kind of magnificent. She just smiled. She just sat there and smiled and didn't say a word and pretty soon his companions took him off with 'em."

They had gone all the way through the blacked-out city to Piazza Colonna when Joe said, "Maybe we oughta go back. The Valsettis might be home by now."

They missed their bridge by one and walked along beside the Tiber, where the trees held out even the light of the sky. So that by the time they saw the three women they were face to face and the big blond was laughing:

"Oh Joe, I lawv you—" and her hand had a firm grip on his pants.

Joe grabbed her hand. "*Grazia,* no," he said. "Let's get out of here."

They pushed through the three women and reached the bridge.

"Let's run, for the hell of it."

They ran across the bridge. When they stopped on the other side Burt was laughing.

"A man's got to run from it here," Burt said. "A man's got to protect himself. A man ain't safe."

"I hope the Valsettis are home," Joe said. "I feel like throwing up."

VIII. Signora Gina Valsetti

STANDING before the mirror in her bedroom, Signora Gina Valsetti opened her eyes very wide, and made her mouth into a small red circle. Then she narrowed her eyes and smiled, her gold tooth flashing. Then she sobered her face and stared at it. She was not so old, she thought, leaning close to the mirror and peering at the crow's-feet around her eyes. Only thirty-eight. And she was much slimmer than she had been five years ago, before the war. She was always hungry now, but her figure was certainly improved.

She stepped back, keeping her eyes on her image. Well, she wasn't *too* skinny. She placed her hands under her big breasts. They were still firmer than many girls ever had. Men liked a woman who was well built. What kind of women, she wondered, did the two *Americani* like? All of their women you saw in the magazines and the movies were so thin, so tall. But she had caught these two looking at her.

Whenever she thought about the two *Americani* she grew excited. Since Mario had introduced them to her five days ago she had been almost too excited to do her housework. She'd never rented the spare bedroom to soldiers before, even the Germans had not stayed there. The only thing the Germans had done was come and take all their woolen clothing, her fur coat, all the food in the apartment. But now the *Americani* were in the city and what a different place it was! Everywhere girls were walking with soldiers, having a good time. And she had seen Signora Mazzi in Apartment 19 come home followed by a soldier last week. She hadn't blamed her either, her husband was in the army. Why wasn't Mario in the army? If he were in the army, she could have some fun too. She was still young enough to have some fun. But Mario was too old to be in the army, fifteen years older than she, too old for anything. . . .

That Giuseppe was the one, though, the stout dark soldier. He had brought two women here, each of them in broad daylight. And he'd even introduced her to the little blond. "This is Maria Consorte," he'd said, just as if it were nothing at all in his young life to bring a prostitute home. Her friend Angela and she had laughed about it. Poor Angela, Gina Valsetti thought, she wanted a man so bad. She hadn't seen her husband in three years—he was probably dead. Now that she thought about it, it was really Angela who had started her plotting about the two *Americani*.

She turned from the mirror and began to straighten the bed. Tonight we will see, she thought. Tonight we will see what the *Americani* like.

She began to hum to herself. It had been clever of her, the way she had sent Mario out of town. And of course they did need fruits and vegetables, you couldn't buy them in Rome except for a fortune. He would be gone until tomorrow morning, and tonight—well, tonight she and her friend Angela were going to a movie, and have a little wine, and then come home and talk to the two *Americani*. The two *Americani* would be here all right—they wouldn't be able to bring any other women into the apartment because she'd lock the door and they'd have to wait till Angela and she returned.

Her blood sang in her chest. It was the first adventure she had had in ages . . . since the time six years ago when Mario's younger brother had come to stay with them and Mario had gone off to work in the morning. Now there were no such opportunities, Mario never went off to work, he was always around the apartment. They had to live on the dab of money they'd saved up, and the little Mario made by buying black market sugar and coffee and bacon from the soldiers and reselling it.

The idea of going out of town to get fruits and vegetables had really been a bright idea, she told herself again, humming away and smoothing the creases out of the bedspread. And tonight her chaperon Angela and she would see. They would see what kind of women the *Americani* liked tonight.

At four o'clock, when Gina Valsetti answered the door and Angela stood there, they both began to giggle immediately. They felt like two sixteen-year-old girls who are going out with boys for the first time.

"Come in, husband!" Gina laughed. "Won't you sit down, husband? You must watch me very carefully, husband, or I might slip away and make a cuckold of you!"

Gina washed, powdered, brushed her teeth, plucked her eyebrows, took the curlers out of her hair and set it carefully, put on her best summer dress, a bright red-and-yellow print, and her best shoes. As a last touch, she brought out a pair of red-and-yellow earrings which she'd bought yesterday when she was planning this holiday. She looked at herself in the mirror and told herself that she was not so old after all. I have a better figure right now than many girls ever have, she decided.

She certainly did glisten beside Angela, who was five years younger than Signora Valsetti, but very dark. Angela had large dark eyes, with black circles under them caused by a liver disturbance, and thick dark lips. Her broad forehead and high cheekbones were those of an Italian peasant, and her sturdy body was built for work and bambinos.

"The *Americani* have not been in all day?" Angela asked.

"Not since this morning. Giuseppe said they were going to visit the Vatican, but they haven't come back."

When they went out and Angela saw Gina locking the door, she asked, "How will they get in if you lock it?"

Gina smiled at her. "They will have to wait for us," she said.

They started back to the apartment at ten, giggling about everything all the way, both feeling set up with the wine they'd drunk and making cracks to each other about "their *Americani*." The movie had been about a Chicago gangster named Humphrey Bogart who had been equally rough with his women and his enemies. Gina remembered that Giuseppe had mentioned coming from Chicago, it gave him new romance in her eyes.

The apartment seemed very quiet. They sat in the living room and drank more wine, neither saying anything, both listening for footsteps. They'd downed three glasses before the rap on the door came. Their eyes met, then they both doubled, choking on their giggles. But Gina got herself under control finally and putting her finger to her lips marched to the door.

"Buona sera, Signora Valsetti," the two soldiers said almost in unison.

"Buona sera, Giuseppe . . . and Burt," she answered, beaming.

Their four eyes first looked at her, then past her to Angela gazing out at them with a drunken gleam in her eye. Gina led them into the living room.

"Have a glass of vino with us," she said.

They looked from her face to Angela's face and back again. When they didn't answer, just stood there, Gina went into the kitchen and brought back two more glasses and poured them a drink.

She felt so stuffed with laughter she'd been avoiding Angela's face, but as she sat down she caught Angela's crazy eye and the two were off again, rocking in their chairs, convulsed. It was Angela this time, with tears streaming down her dark face, who finally recovered enough to point a finger at Gina and scream, "I'm . . . I'm her . . . husband tonight!"

The two *Americani* sat down at this. They both took long drinks and their faces began to smile a little too.

Gina took Giuseppe's hand. "You see, my friend, my husband is out of town and won't be back till tomorrow. And Angela is my husband for tonight. My chaperon!" But it was too much, there was Angela's crazy eye again and they were both choked with laughter. And the two *Americani* were laughing too, both tilted their glasses and finished off their drinks.

"Ancora," Angela said, pouring another round.

The two *Americani* began to see the joke of Angela as Gina's husband better by the end of their second glass. And after the third round, Angela was sitting up close to Burt, pretending she was reading his palm and finding out about all his love affairs. And Gina had run into her bedroom and come back with pictures of herself at sixteen and eighteen and now was sitting very close to Giuseppe displaying them proudly. The fourth round finished off the bottle, so Gina stood on a chair and brought another down from the closet where Mario had hidden it. She almost fell over from dizziness when she hopped to the floor, but Giuseppe steadied her and she began to giggle seeing her hand go up to his head and run through his thick hair.

"Girls!" she laughed. "Lots of girls you bring up here! You like girls!" When he blushed she threw her head back and laughed still harder. "Angela!" she called, "Here is an *Americano* who blushes about girls!"

"Oh they like the Roman ladies, the *Americani* do!" Angela shouted back, and Gina almost fell off her chair, she thought that so funny.

Now with the second bottle Gina was playing the game of keeping the glasses always filled. It was gone in what seemed like a moment and here they were on a third. But before they'd drunk it halfway down Angela stood up very straight and announced that she was hungry. So Gina, wavering a little, stood up as straight as she could and announced that she was hungry too.

The two *Americani,* whose faces were quite red by now, got the idea and led the way into their room. They opened their duffel bags dutifully and brought out more chocolate bars than Gina had seen in five years. Angela and she began to cram them into their mouths as fast as they could, still laughing and giggling between bites. She ate so many that one moment she thought she was going to be sick, then she recovered and crammed in another.

But Angela had eaten all she could hold, she was looking at her watch. "Oh my God!" she said. "It's two o'clock!"

Everybody looked at everybody else, as if all wondered what they should think about the hour two o'clock.

Angela pointed to Giuseppe's bed and said, "There is a bed and here is a bed, room for the four of us!"

Gina found herself nodding at her and smiling and the two soldiers were both looking at them, smiling too. Gina stretched and yawned elaborately and Angela did likewise. The two *Americani,* bleary-eyed, looked at each other drunkenly, then looked back at them.

"I have a better idea!" Gina announced. "Let's all go and sleep in my big bed!"

She grabbed Giuseppe's hand and Angela grabbed Burt's hand. Out through the messy living room they led them, into the front bedroom.

"Lights out!" Gina announced. Before they knew where they were, she'd turned the switch and the room was black.

Giggles and whispers seemed to come from all the corners of the room now. Several loud kisses sounded—whether her own or Angela's Gina couldn't tell. Then all four sat on the side of the big bed, dropping shoes on the floor and saying "Shhhh! Shhhh!" loudly to one another.

Someone pounding on the door! Gina sat up, her blood standing still. It was morning—light streamed through the window, there were noises in the street. My God, she thought. She pulled herself out from under Giuseppe's heavy leg, noted the three sleeping faces as she slipped on her wrapper.

Had she dreamed the knock? she thought, standing in the foyer. Surely it couldn't be noon—

The knock came again.

"Who is it?" she called, her voice cracking.

"Mario."

Her heart was like an elevator out of control as it fell inside her. "One moment, dear!" she called hoarsely and rushed back into the bedroom.

She hammered on the three bodies indiscriminately and their eyes looked stupidly at her as she hissed, "My husband! My husband!" Angela was out of bed like a flash and then all four were darting around the room gathering the confused *Americani's* shoes and socks and underpants and trousers and shirts.

"Go! Go!" Gina whispered, pushing the two overladen soldiers out through the foyer.

When she heard their bedroom door close behind them, she set her face in a smile and unbolted the apartment door.

"Good morning, dear."

Old Mario trudged in with his covered baskets of fruits and vegetables. "Rain," he was mumbling. "Nothing but rain." He set the baskets on the floor in the kitchen. "What a night! What a train!"

Gina couldn't answer, she had to clamp her jaws together to keep her teeth from clattering. But as she watched him take off his coat and brush the rain from his hat, it suddenly began to dawn on her: he knew nothing! And the longer she gazed into his simple face, the better she knew. He would never suspect at all! A great happiness enveloped her. She had had an adventure, a real adventure . . . and a joke too! She had played a marvelous joke on him for being so old and making her life so dull.

She lit the gas stove and poured water into a pan for the coffee. "Yes," she said, "it was a very bad night. I could hardly sleep for the pounding the rain made." She hummed a little song as she unpacked the baskets, commenting now and then on the things he had brought and asking prices.

Old Mario was yawning and stretching. "What a night!" he said. "I'm going to bed."

But Gina was too quick for him. "I have your coffee almost ready," she said. "Wait here and have a cup while I go in and straighten the bed." She was so relieved when he sat down that she said to him kindly, "The bed will be nice and warm for you. Angela and I just got up ourselves."

IX. Pfc Joe Hammond

THEY slept till two o'clock in the afternoon, and when they awoke they didn't talk.

Burt lay on his bed smoking a cigarette and staring at the ceiling, and Joe got up and washed himself all over. Then he stood looking at his big face in the mirror, noting the bloodshot eyes. This is the face that came to Rome on furlough, he thought. I brought this face all the way up here from San Cialo on a GI truck, but you'd never know it was the same one.

He looked at his hair, his eyes, his nose, and finally at his mouth. A full red sensual mouth, the lips well defined, the underlip large, the corners turned up a little. This is the mouth, he thought, that came to Rome to kiss several women and help the rest of Pfc Joe Hammond, U.S. Army, remember that it's alive.

He started drying himself.

So I'm alive, he thought. Alive like a man who has just seen eight movies, one after another, and comes out feeling like eight different people, all heroes and all not himself.

There was Burt over there, staring at the ceiling. He wondered if Burt still felt slightly married, after what had happened last night in this apartment. He wondered what Burt was thinking about.

He put on his socks, then his shoes.

"How does the Eternal City look to you so early in the morning?" Joe asked.

Burt took several puffs on his cigarette before he pulled it from his mouth and said, "I feel like I've just spent four days on the roller coaster."

"We'll go out and eat some eggs," Joe said, "and you'll feel better."

Burt got up and began to wash. Joe noticed that he looked at his face in the mirror too.

"I need more than eggs," Burt said. "I need my wife."

"I feel like I need my wife too," Joe said. "Only I haven't got one."

"I thought you had about five wives in the last five days, all told," Burt said.

Joe took a package of cigarettes from his barracks bag and opened it. He felt rotten. "Last night," he said, gazing at the carpet. "We must have been crazy. I didn't want anything like that. It was all stupid, and we were all drunk. Even while I was doing it I didn't want to do it."

"I know how it is, *amico,* but we did it anyhow, didn't we."

"We were drunk."

"Right. You couldn't have found a better word. Did you hear Signora Valsetti singing away this morning while she did her housework?"

"She probably had a good time," Joe said. "I don't know, I don't remember anything about it."

Burt came over and looked at him. "What the hell is wrong with you? You sound like you've suddenly grown a conscience, old boy. What about those other three girls you picked up? Were you drunk then too?"

"No," he said, "I wasn't drunk then."

"And by the way, what happened to the one you picked up in the park last night?"

Joe played with the venetian blind. He closed his eyes and remembered the slender sad girl from Livorno and thought of what they had found in the dark café, and of how they had walked on the street clutching hands, hurrying to be together.

"Her name was Gianna Verdetta," Joe said. "We came up here and the door was locked and she went away. She said she'd come back but it started to rain. I waited for her and then you came along. Otherwise I'd have waited for her all night. I was in love with her."

"What about the little blond in the red dress?" Burt asked sarcastically. "Were you deeply in love with her too?"

Maria Consorte, Joe thought, opening and closing the venetian blind. Maria, the little imp who laughed so much, who had dyed her hair and got herself the brighest red dress she could find to be the belle of the town in. Why hadn't he gone back that last day? he wondered. Why had he gone to Nina Bonte instead? What a crazy whirlwind of girls he had made of it. What had he really been up to?

"Yeah," Joe answered, "I was in love with her too. I still am."

Burt laughed. "You really showed a whole new side of your personality on this trip, Casanova."

They opened the door and went out. Signora Valsetti was in the kitchen and beamed at them as they went by. Angela wasn't around.

They ate three eggs and steak and bread and drank red wine in a restaurant two blocks away. There were no other customers and the restaurant was dark. They didn't talk till they got to their cigarettes.

"Now it's all over," Joe said.

"We've got to leave tomorrow, all right."

"It doesn't seem like six days, it seems like a month or a year." He thought about it, blowing out smoke. "No, that isn't it either. Actually it doesn't seem like any length of time at all. It seems like no time. Like a dream. Like something whole and complete out of my life that I'll never come back to continue." He looked at Burt. "You thought I was kidding before with all that stuff about being in love."

"We-ell," Burt said. "As an old married man, y'know, I'd say that if you weren't joking you must be slightly nuts."

Joe didn't answer and they paid the check and went out.

But on the street Joe said, "That's the way it is, I am nuts. When I got into Rome I went slightly crazy. I wanted everything again. I wanted it all at once. I wanted a girl to be in love with again. I wanted to be in one small room with her, and to be decent to her. I wanted several lifetimes in a few days. There wasn't time for anything less. I guess I wanted to be in love again."

"Yeah," Burt said.

"And the city itself was like a big reflection of the way I felt. The girls I met weren't whores. They were just girls. They were crazy for life fast, too. They're messed up in the war and the bottom has fallen out of the world. They're rescuing themselves and maybe Rome too the way they know how. They're being themselves, making love, saving something out of the mess."

"That's the most sentimental bunch of shit I ever heard," Burt laughed. "What the hell is wrong with you anyhow? These girls are walking the street because they're hungry. They're not trying to bring anything big into your life or their own. They want to keep alive."

They went over and sat on a bench in Piazza Cavour park.

Joe looked at the toes of his shoes.

"It isn't like that either," he said. "That's only the surface reason. The reason that maybe they themselves would give you. But there was something great in being with Maria Consorte and Gianna Verdetta. They were people, and they did not ask for anything except to be kept alive and maybe to be loved. I feel right now as if I'd known them all my life."

Burt didn't say anything. They sat there for a long time.

Then Joe said, "Let's go now. Let's start back today."

"A day early!" Burt said. "You want us to be the laughing stock back at camp?"

"It's all over," Joe said. "I don't want anything more to happen. It's all too goddamn sad."

They went up and packed fast and paid old Mario Valsetti and told him to say goodbye to his wife for them and in half an hour were out on the street again.

"Should we try to get a plane hop or hitchhike?" Burt said.

"Let's hitch," Joe said. "We've plenty of time. We'll look at the country. For the first time since I've been here Italy is beginning to look human to me."

They got a carriage and clop-clopped along toward the streetcar line that would take them out to the Appian Way.

Joe leaned back, puzzled and dreamy. He looked at the girls on the street and they meant nothing to him now. The whole trip was already like some confusing event from a long time ago that he still puzzled over. Nina Bonte, Maria Consorte, Gianna Verdetta, even Gina and Angela—they were all different people essentially, but it seemed to him that they were all trying somehow to get back to the same things, to offer the same things, to reap something out of the hopeless sterility of Rome in 1944.

Truckloads of soldiers coming into Rome from the south passed their carriage. The soldiers were standing in the big army trucks and staring at the girls eagerly. Joe thought of the hundreds who flooded into Rome every day for their first look at the city, and the hundreds who went out at the same time, having seen Rome, having had this experience that was Rome.

And then he saw the monument. He had seen it a thousand times before, in pictures and reproductions, but seeing it now electrified him. It was the statue of Romulus and Remus being fed by the she-wolf. It was the statue of the great she-wolf, cast in bronze, offering herself to the two helpless man-creatures. They strained to suckle her great teats, and in their grasping they reached for life itself.

Joe stared back at the statue long after they had passed it. It was the same one he had seen before but it was different now. His head was hot and pounding, he felt somehow emotionally involved in something he couldn't get into words.

He didn't mention it to Burt, not even after they'd turned a corner and lost it.

They got out of the carriage and took a streetcar out to the Appian Way. Half an hour went by before two Limeys in a weapons-carrier picked them up.

Riding along, Joe felt Burt peering with interest into his face.

"You're looking pensive, *amico,*" Burt said.

"Tired." The emotion at seeing the statue was leaving him fast now.

Burt stooped down on the floor and lit a cigarette. "It was a great trip, wasn't it." He gave Joe a light.

"Yeah."

Burt continued the peering, smiling, as if he divined what Joe was thinking about. He dragged on his cigarette.

"I should have said, it *will* have been a great trip," Burt said, the knowing smile still there. "I mean, if you and I don't get a dose."

BEFORE THIS, IN DREAMS

by Teo Savory

I. Mrs. Ayers

After Gordon's wife died, the Hanmer house was shut up and nobody in our neighborhood expected it to be lived in again. Gordon was like an old man when Cora died, worn out way before his time, and without her there was no one to look after him; his children had moved away as soon as they were grown and took no more interest in him than he had ever shown in them. Dr. McCabe said that Gordon would be better off in a sanitarium: one fine day he was shipped off to a place in California. The house was shut up without a caretaker or even a handyman to look after it. The place went to seed fast. It got on my nerves for fair, living next door to such an eyesore. I was always complaining to Henry about it, but he just shrugged his shoulders and said what could *he* do.

When we built our place up on Union Heights—that was the year before Marge was born—it was the last house on Beechwood Drive. It was a steep climb from the trolley stop, but we liked it for the view. You could see the whole town spread out in front of you, almost at your feet, with the river winding through and, off in the distance, the mountain with its thick cover of snow. Henry and I, when we were younger, used to sit out on the front porch of an evening, looking at the sunset reflected on the mountain and then watching the lights flick on below us. Out at the back our land climbs up to a ridge from where you can see the Tuolumne Valley, the grain fields laid out neat as a good piece of patchwork, the prettiest shades of pale green in the spring, when the wheat is ripening. The clearing is still there, up on the ridge, where Henry made a little picnic ground with a stone oven, for us to enjoy our supper on a mild evening. When Gordon saw our clearing, he decided to build him a big summer house—he had three carpenters working all summer, making a real fancy place, rustic style I suppose you'd call it, with a slate floor. That was the way Gordon did everything. Somebody else would get something and he would get a better one. Then after a spell he'd lose interest and go on to something new.

In fact, that was how the Hanmer family came to live on Union Heights in the first place, next door to us. A few months after we were settled, Gordon bought the lot at the end of Beechwood Drive and the land beyond it right up to the top of the ridge and over the slope towards the Valley. He said that the land would be valuable, on account of the Heights being the fashionable part of Fort Union, and that he was going to develop it and sell it for building lots at a big profit. Like all Gordon's schemes, this one, too, came to nothing. 'Our part of the Heights,' I remember Henry saying to him at the time, 'isn't exactly unfashionable—it's just kind of inaccessible.' And later on, when the town started to grow, residential sections were built up on the other side of the river and all of Union Heights became old-fashioned. That didn't bother Henry and me any: the air is clearer up here, the neighbors don't live in your pocket the way they do across the river, there's plenty of space for the children to play.

But Gordon was no end provoked: after building such a big house—too big even when his youngsters lived there—and going to so much expense, covering the place with porches and gables and gingerbread carving, even getting a lot of scrub oak pulled up and leveling the ground for a tennis court, he wearied of the property, when he saw that the Drive would stay what it had always been—a dead-end road; and he never spent a dime on it again. Instead of finishing his tennis court, he went off and bought a yacht. My land, but it was funny about that yacht. There was no fitting place to sail it, not like up to Seattle, where they have the Sound and all. No one could go out in the Pacific Ocean in such a flimsy little boat; and, though there's a long stretch of river between here and the sea, that yacht was forever getting stuck on the sand-bars off Kaanen's Island, down where the Finns live. Henry laughed and said to him, 'Why don't you settle for a house-boat?' Gordon got so mad he puffed up like a turkey cock. Pompous, Gordon was, about anything to do with himself. If a person hadn't had to live next door to him, he might have seemed quite comical at times.

So that's the way Gordon was, and the reason why the place went downhill so fast after he left it. The house hadn't had a coat of paint for years and soon it looked like a deserted beach house, waiting to fall into driftwood; the children said it was haunted and made up all kinds of stories to frighten themselves with. I must say it did look kind of eerie at night, with the lights from automobiles flashing in those empty windows. The front steps fell in and there were places in the porch you could have put your foot through. I was always telling Marge not to go up there, but sometimes, when she thought I wouldn't catch her at it, she liked to go and peak through the front windows. The chandelier in the dining-room was done up in a white bag, like a big bee-hive hanging off the ceiling. The furniture in the parlor, covered up with dust sheets, looked like ghosts sitting around for a rest, Marge said. All the flowers Cora had planted so carefully had gone wild or been choked up with weeds. In the spring I used to go over and tend the rose bushes. Cora had set such stock by them. Henry said I was sentimental, breaking my back for a dead woman, but, someway, I hated to see her work going to waste.

One winter two tramps broke into the basement and set up house there, till I made Henry get the sheriff after them. There wasn't another soul ever came near the property for five years, until the morning the car drove up.

I was in the front room doing the dusting when I heard it coming. It was being driven so fast you could hear it right from the bottom of the road. I ran to the front window, wondering whose it was and where it was going. It was a red roadster, brightest red I ever saw. Who can it be? I thought—must be coming here, no place else it could go. But it whizzed by and drove up to the Hanmer house. Well, I never was so surprised in all my born days! I called Marge—school had broken for the summer a few days before—and told her to run down to the Purdy house next door, and tell Mrs. Purdy what was going on. I didn't want to leave the window long enough to phone.

I knew it couldn't be Gordon Hanmer driving the car. We could tell by the look of him, when he went to California, that he'd never be driving or doing much of anything again. I was near eaten up with curiosity when I saw the car doors open and two strangers get out, a woman and a boy. They took a pile of bundles out of the car and some suitcases. The woman went around to the back door. I got out to the kitchen in time to see her take a key from her purse and let herself into the Hanmer house. She was a big, bold-looking woman with dark hair and dark eyes. Her purse was shiny red patent-leather, as red as that car. She moved slow and lazy-like. I guess she might have been called good-looking if anyone was partial to that type. When she saw me watching her, she smiled, but it wasn't the kind of smile that has any pleasure back of it. She smiled slowly, the same as she moved, and the way she looked at me made me mighty uncomfortable. I moved back from the window where she couldn't see me so well.

After she and the boy had carried all their things inside, she got in her car again and drove off down the hill as fast as you please. The boy stayed behind. He opened all the windows and started cleaning the house. I watched him all morning and in the afternoon Mrs. Purdy came over and watched with me. What could it mean? we asked each other. If the place had been sold we would have heard of it; anyhow, that woman hadn't looked like *she'd* be buying it. On the other hand, she hadn't looked like a nurse, either, or a housekeeper—not her!—so it couldn't mean Gordon was being brought home again. Besides, every time we saw Dr. McCabe and asked him about Gordon, he said the same thing: that Gordon was well looked after in the sanitarium and not likely to leave it. I called Henry up and told him. What can it mean? I asked him. He said how could he know any more than I did about it and not to bother him, because it was a busy time in the office.

The next day the boy had finished cleaning. He came outside and started clearing up the yard. That boy was a funny-looking one. He was as dark as the woman, his hair dead black and his skin as sallow and even-toned as a heathen's. Aside from his hair, though, and his brown eyes, he didn't much resemble that woman. He was very thin and delicate-boned. He looked to me like he needed a good course of fattening up. His face was narrow with high cheekbones and hollows underneath them. Marge said he looked like a picture in Fran Wallace's ancient history book, so I told her not to get notions and sent her downtown on an errand.

The boy worked hard. He did everything neatly, each little chore as thoroughly as if his life depended on it. His face was serious and never smiled or changed any. It was because of that, him being so serious and intent, that I couldn't tell how old he was. At first glance he looked like a boy in his late teens, but he went at his work like a grown man. He spent all morning in the side yard and in the afternoon he started out front. The labor must have been hard for him, maybe painful, because of his crippled leg. As he moved around from one place to another, I saw that his left foot dragged behind him at every step.

I had the busiest day I can remember. What with the phone ringing every few minutes (the neighbors wanting to know the latest news) and what with trying to get my own work done in between spells of looking at that boy, I hardly had time to draw a deep breath.

After a day or two that boy began to give me the creeps. It was a fair treat, how tidy he was making the place, but he took no pleasure out of it. He drove himself on from one piece of work to the next. He seemed old beyond his years; I wondered if he'd ever played or had any fun. His foot slowed him up considerable: when he was in a hurry he had to hop along—it was like a bird with one wing broken. I wanted to call out to him to sit down and take a rest; once I had the notion of taking him some lemonade; but there was an air about him, a kind of all-alone look, that stopped me getting neighborly.

It was actully a relief, three days later, when that car tore up the road again and I knew that something more would happen. Plenty happened! That woman got out of the car, the boy came out of the house in a hurry, hoppity-skip, and the next thing I saw they were taking a passenger out of the car. Nothing but a parcel of rugs and shawls it was, at first, with no way to tell if it was man or woman, young or old. The woman unwound this bundle, with the boy helping her, and I saw it was Gordon Hanmer. One on each side of him, they trundled him into the house. That was news, all right, but I didn't know what to make of it.

Henry said that we were a bunch of gossiping old women, up on Beechwood Drive. Though I noticed, that first evening, that he went out on the porch, taking his pipe as an excuse, and had a good look at the Hanmer house for himself. He pretended to be above natural human curiosity. 'If you're all so curious,' he asked, 'why don't you go to call?'

'I'm in no hurry to get acquainted with that woman, whatever she may be doing here,' I said to Henry, 'or that boy, either, whoever he may be. And Mrs. Purdy feels the same as I do.'

'Whoever-he-may-be is most likely her son,' Henry answered, 'and what they're doing is looking after Gordon.' Henry spoke up to me very sharply. 'I wish you wouldn't go making mysteries out of the most ordinary events,' he said.

'I'll wait and see how things shape up before I go putting myself forward,' I told him.

The house changed little by little. The dark boy clipped back the laurels from the front porch and mowed the grass. He worked every afternoon, even when the weather grew unseasonably warm, and gradually the old place lost its down-to-heels look, though the front steps were beyond repair and the house still needed some fresh paint. At night, it was cheerful to see the patterns of lamplight coming out the front windows that had been dark and lonesome for so long. If I took a short stroll up to the end of the Drive, I could see, through the shadows of the porch, into the parlor; I could see Gordon sitting at a table with a card game in front of him and the dark woman, sitting nearby, turning over the pages of a magazine. Even though Gordon and the strangers seemed unfriendly, it was cozy to have people living in the house again.

And they did seem mighty unfriendly. Twice a week, the woman drove the glaring red car downtown to the market. And twice a week Dr. McCabe drove up to pay Gordon a visit. Otherwise, no one went near the place. Dr. McCabe had never been one to give away information and now he became downright closemouthed. Even though Mrs. Purdy went to the expense of calling him in when Jim Junior had nothing more than a case of the sniffles, we couldn't find out a thing. Marge turned into a regular nuisance, teasing me to go call or thinking up excuses to run over next door. I wanted to send her away to camp, but Henry said he couldn't afford it—said he hadn't sold enough farm implements, that spring, to till a vegetable patch. After the Purdy boys went away, and the Wallace children from down the road, it was lonely for Marge and I had my hands full thinking up things to keep her occupied.

The dark boy didn't have much to do with the other two—Gordon and the woman. He did the housework and worked around the grounds, but in the evenings, when Gordon and the woman would sit so snugly in the parlor, he never joined them. As soon as he'd cleared away the supper dishes, each evening a short while before sunset, he'd leave the house and climb up the hill towards the old Hanmer summer house, climbing up the steep path through the woods with his bad foot dragging at every step.

II. Larry

Long before I saw the girl, I knew that she had been watching me. As soon as I cleared away the supper dishes, each evening, I got out of the house and climbed up the hill. It was good to get out-doors again. Gordon Hanmer stayed in his room all day, but at supper-time he came out; the three of us ate together in the dining-room and afterwards he and Lottie would sit together in the parlor. I could keep out of his way until then; but when I had to see him sitting there, toad-like, staring at Lottie, I would begin to feel the air in that house was choking me.

It was a stiff climb to the hilltop but there was a fine view from it. The evening air was soft, sometimes there would be a light breeze full of the smell of the drying hay down in the Valley, and I could hear many birds singing in the trees around me. A summer house had been built on the summit, from where the countryside was visible for miles; on the one hand the town and the river and the distant mountain, on the other the whole Tuolumne Valley. The summer house had mostly rotted away, but the stone floor was still firm and smooth; standing there, I looked down every evening on the Valley and watched the sunset.

My first day at the house I had seen the girl next door; she came out, once, into her side yard and looked at me over the hedge, but soon her mother had called to her and she never came out again. But every evening I heard twigs snapping and the rustle of the bushes where she hid herself and watched me. I could see her dress, there among the darkening trees, distinct as a new flag. Even before she spoke to me, I sensed that her watching was not hostile, that she hid there only because she was too shy, perhaps, to approach. I wanted to call to her, but I was afraid to.

I must have been living in Mr. Hanmer's house nearly a month before the girl spoke to me. The days had blended into one another, moving lazily on toward mid-summer, so that I had lost track of them. But one evening she stumbled over a fallen branch. Even though I was used to her being there in the trees, I was startled and turned around. When she knew I had heard her she came out into the clearing and spoke to me. 'Don't get scared,' she said. 'It's only me.' She laughed, saying, 'It must have sounded like a herd of buffalo.' Her laugh was a giggle, really, but it sounded natural and friendly, not like the stupid sniggering of my sisters when they whispered together in corners, sharing their secrets with each other. I could not answer the girl, for, as she walked toward the summer house and I saw her plainly, I was astonished at how pretty she was; I could only stand there, tongue-tied, looking at her. 'I'm Margaret,' she said, 'Margaret Ayers. I live next door to you.'

She had on a summer dress, of soft, white material, that was probably intended for playing games. It had a short, full skirt and no sleeves. Her legs and arms were a smooth, warm tan. Her face, too, was tanned, so that her skin looked darker than her hair, which was very light and fine. I had never seen anyone who looked like her. I realized that she must be fourteen or fifteen, about the same age as my younger sister, but she did not resemble Hazel in the least. This girl looked as if she could swim for miles, if she chose, or run very fast with her hair blowing out behind her. I was sharply conscious of my dark, sallow skin and, most of all, of my leg. I was afraid she would notice it. Her eyes, deeply blue, examined me with a direct glance, neither friendly nor unfriendly, but waiting, questioning a little. I wanted to talk to her, but what could I say? If I told her anything about myself, I thought, anything at all, then she would surely run away. She stood at the foot of the stone steps, looking up at me, puzzled, now, that I did not speak to her. I could have told her my name, but I was ashamed of it. I could not tell her why I had come to Fort Union, because Lottie's reason for leaving Wheatville was now obscure to me. Margaret looked grown-up, older than I felt at that moment, standing there so cool and serious.

Just then she noticed the box standing beside me on the floor of the summer house. 'What's in there?' she asked.

'My tame chipmunk,' I answered. I was glad there was something I could talk about freely and I began to tell her how I had happened to find it.

During my second day at the house, while Lottie was away, fetching Mr. Hanmer from California, I had seen the chipmunk when I was clearing up the grounds. 'He was sitting on that tree stump in the front yard,' I said to Margaret. I had stopped raking, I recalled, and moved softly as I came nearer; but he had not taken fright even when I stood close in front of him. 'He sat up on his haunches,' I said, 'and stared at me in the cheekiest way you ever saw, chattering like a little monkey and sort of shadow-boxing with his front paws.' Later I had searched under the trees for nuts and placed a pile of them on the stump. 'Every morning, after that, he was waiting for me,' I went on, 'and in a few days he was so tame I could pick him up in my hand.' I had decided to keep him on the front porch: no one went out there because some of the boards were rotting and the steps had fallen in. I found an old grocery carton and made him a roomy nest. He slept in it at night and when, in the mornings, I let him out, he scampered around the garden after me before going off to hunt for his food. I always shut him up again before supper-time, so that Mr. Hanmer wouldn't see him.

When I had finished telling Margaret about the chipmunk, I opened the box and showed him to her. 'He doesn't seem very lively,' she said. Indeed, the chipmunk just lay there, looking up at us without curiosity. 'That's because he got hurt last night,' I explained. 'He got out of the box, some way, and during the night his paw got hurt.' I had cleaned the wound, but the paw was still swollen and bruised-looking. Margaret, leaning over the box, began to make a fuss of the chipmunk and I watched her, enjoying her gentleness; but after a moment she looked up at me and asked sharply, 'How did he get out of the box?'

'Well, I guess somebody let him out.' I spoke awkwardly, not wanting Margaret to know the suspicions I had been trying to conceal, even from myself, all day. That morning, when I had come downstairs to get breakfast, I had found the box open, its lid lying deliberately on the floor beside it; the chipmunk was gone and, though I called and whistled for him all morning, he did not come back. 'I finally found him hiding under the porch,' I said to Margaret, 'this evening after supper.' At last he had let me coax him back into his box and I had carried it up the hill with me, for I had decided it would be safer to keep him in the summer house.

As if speaking my own, scarcely formulated, thoughts, Margaret said, 'That old Gordon Hanmer!' In her voice was a blend of disgust and matter-of-factness. 'I remember when I was little,' she said, 'I guess it was before I started school, even, when somebody gave George a hound puppy.' I did not need to ask Margaret who George was, for I had seen many pictures of him in an old album and I knew that he was Mr. Hanmer's son. 'George was certainly stuck on that dog,' Margaret continued. 'He'd been trying to make the high school track team, but he gave up training so as to hurry home every afternoon—he said he was going to train his dog to hunt. Well, one day George came home and there was the hound with its leg broken. That old Gordon Hanmer had been pushing it off the front porch all morning, trying to make it jump. I saw it all happen—how Mr. Hanmer threw the dog over the porch railing and broke its leg. I just never could forget the awful howling noise it made, lying there on the ground. . . .'

Now it seemed to me as if I had known, from my first sight of him, that Mr. Hanmer was a cruel and unnatural old man, sick with an ailment besides heart trouble: sick with his own meanness.

'George had to take the dog out back and shoot it,' Margaret was saying. 'Mr. Hanmer claimed he'd only been trying to teach it some tricks, but everyone knew better—he was always doing something mean.'

I had known that Mr. Hanmer was like this, but I had not wished to consider it, for that thought led to another, unendurable one: why was Lottie here with him? Suddenly I knew that Mr. Hanmer alone had not tortured the chipmunk. He was too feeble to get about by himself.

Had Lottie shown him the box, helped him out to it and then, perhaps, stayed there and watched him?

All at once I shivered and Margaret, whom I had forgotten for a moment, nudged my side, asking, 'What's the matter? Goose walking over your grave?' I said nothing: it would not have been fitting to tell her of my speculations. . . . There was, after all, no subject for us to talk about, and the silence grew prolonged.

Margaret spoke abruptly. 'My mother says you're a gypsy!' She no longer looked grown-up, but, made uncomfortable by my silence and so having blurted out the first thing that occurred to her, she was now flushed with embarrassment. But when she said those words they were an echo of many others, spoken contemptuously in the past. I turned away from her, but she put out her hand, touching my arm, and said, 'That's only what my mother said. *I* don't think so.' She came and stood beside me on the floor of the crumbled summer house. 'Why do you come up here every day?'

I pointed down across the Valley. 'Over there is Wheatville,' I answered. 'That's where I came from.' I could see the little town clearly in the evening light. It looked tiny but very close, like a model I might hold in my hand.

'Well!' she said scornfully. 'I don't know why you want to look at that jerky place. I'd be glad to get away from it, myself."

'I am,' I told her. 'Or anyhow, I thought I was.'

'Not that Fort Union is so much,' Margaret said. 'But it must be better than that old Wheatville.'

I wanted to tell her that I had been waiting all my life to get away from there and how disappointed I was in this new place; but I could not express these thoughts to her. Every day I saw her mother looking at Lottie and me from behind her curtains, just as the people in Wheatville had watched us; that first day I had waited for Margaret to speak to me, out in the yard, but she had turned away, and later I heard her playing with the boys who lived in the house down the road. It was as lonely in Fort Union as it had been in Wheatville. 'Perhaps everywhere will be the same for me,' I said.

'I don't know what you mean,' Margaret said. 'You sound nutty to me.'

'That's what I mean,' I answered. 'The kids in Wheatville said things like that to me, and they made fun of me, too, asking if I was a gypsy or an Indian.' I knew I could never forget my years at grammar school, when the boys, passively approved by their elders, had thrown stones at me to see me, for their amusement, trying to run on my uneven legs. They had called me Limping Indian and later, even after they had tired of teasing me, they had never dropped the nickname. I wanted to tell Margaret how they had mocked me because of my crippled foot, but I could not bring myself to mention it. 'I guess it's just the same here,' I said to her.

'Well, who are you, anyhow?' she asked. She sounded friendly then, and kinder, as if regretting something she did not wholly understand.

I said, 'My name's Larry.'

She looked at me. 'That's a nice name. I'll tell you a secret. At home they call me Marge and I hate that. I wish you'd call me Margaret.'

'All right,' I said. 'I'll let you name my chipmunk, if you like.' I leaned over to put the lid back on the box. 'I hadn't thought up a name for him yet.'

'It's not so easy to think up a good name for a chipmunk,' Margaret said. 'It's easier to name cats. I always name all our kittens.' I knew that she had a cat, for I had seen her feeding it on the back porch. It was a striped tabby with a torn ear. 'Dinnie has kittens all the time,' Margaret continued. 'Mom hates kittens. She always puts them in a sack and tells Daddy to take them out and drown them.'

'My mother doesn't like animals, either,' I said. 'Not around the house.' I remembered what Lottie had said when I was given a dog. 'I had a friend in Wheatville,' I told Margaret, 'who gave me a dog once. Mr. Lessing, his name was.' ('Nasty, dirty things, messing up the place,' Lottie had said. I was surprised, because she had been around animals so much, at one time. 'I don't like pets,' she had said. She had made me take the dog back.)

Margaret laughed. 'But you know what? Daddy never drowns the kittens. Mom thinks he does, but he doesn't. We drive out to the country and give them to farmers and people.'

'Mr. Lessing, the friend I told you about, had three cats,' I said. 'Two were Persians and one was an alley cat.'

I looked off toward Wheatville again, thinking of Mr. Lessing and of how much I missed him. 'This friend of mine,' I said, 'this Mr. Lessing—he was an inventor. He had a workshop fixed up in the room where he lived. He invented radio improvements and stuff like that.' I recalled the pride I had felt, the first time I was able to work out a problem he had set me. 'The people in Wheatville thought he was a crank, but I found out they were wrong. Some of his inventions are being manufactured right now.'

'There was a man here like that,' Margaret said. 'He was always writing stuff. He's Mrs. Wallace's uncle—they live down the road a ways—and Daddy was friendly with him. Mrs. Wallace and Mom and the Purdys all said he was an awful old loafer. But one day somebody bought one of his books and printed it. He lives in New York now, and you can buy his books at the store. Were they surprised! Mom never got over it.'

'Mr. Lessing used to teach me,' I said. I found that it was quite easy, telling Margaret these things. 'He was an engineer, before he came to Wheatville, and he wanted me to be one, too.'

'Is that what you're going to be?' Margaret asked. She looked at me very admiringly. I had never expected anyone to look at me like that. 'I think that's keen!' she said.

The sun was sinking now and lighting up the Valley with rich colors. 'Let's sit down and watch the sunset,' I said. I spread my handkerchief on the side of the top step for Margaret to sit on. She started to laugh—as if she thought I were joking, and I wondered if I had done something ridiculous—but after a hesitation she sat down and we watched the sunset together. Soon it began to get dark and Margaret stood up. 'I better go home now.'

She smiled at me so warmly that I began to think it might, after all, be different for me here. But I did not dare, yet, to hope so. 'Will I see you again?' I asked her.

She kicked a stone with her foot, hard, and after she had watched it roll down the hill, she said, 'Larry, you're nuts!' She started to run down the path, and, as I had thought, she ran very quickly and lightly. At the edge of the woods she stopped and called out, 'What do you bet you see me tomorrow evening?'

I waited up there until it was dark. I did not want Margaret to see me walk. And I thought that, if I stayed out late enough, I would not have to see Mr. Hanmer and Lottie sitting together when I got back to the house. The shapes of the trees were blurred and shadowy, the leaves of the birches as dark as those of the alders, as if their coloring came only from sunlight. There were many trees on the ridge I had never seen before and whose names I did not know, for none of them grew in the dry Valley where I had lived before. I would have liked to ask Margaret to tell me their names. I sat on the stone step in the warm darkness, remembering all she had said and how she had looked. I decided that if she came back I would tell her that my real name is Lorenzo. If she did not laugh at me I would know she was going to be my friend.

III. *Mrs. Ayers*

As THE summer wore on I began to know the habits of the household next door as well as I know my own. Not that they were anything alike. Dear me, no. That woman had outlandish ways. But as the heat of July continued towards August, she'd have been surprised at how much I'd found out about her habits. The boy was the first one up in the mornings. (He was the only one over there that wasn't shiftless as a bunch of berrypickers.) He cooked the breakfasts and carried them out of the kitchen on trays. That woman never showed herself before noon—I could just picture her up there, lolling in Cora's bed—and when she did get up she slouched around in her dirty pink wrapper. I guess Gordon was too feeble to climb stairs: he slept in the maid's room off the kitchen, where he was tended, noon and evening, by the woman. After he was dressed, she settled him on the sun porch, a plaid shawl draped over his paunchy shoulders, no matter how warm the day. There he was given his lunch, cooked all any old how by the woman, and there he dozed away the afternoons. Luckily, the kitchens of the two houses face each other. Cora had kept the hedge clipped low, and summers, with our windows open, we'd been able to call back and forth to each other while we washed our dishes. But after Gordon came home, I had to hang a scrim curtain over the window, so I could watch in privacy. The dark woman never washed dishes until the sink was piled high and the china cupboards were empty. Cora must have turned in her grave to see what a pig-stye her nice kitchen had become. When she finally did busy herself at the sink, that woman would look up with such a bold glance, right into my face it seemed like, in spite of the curtain, that I always felt she was laughing at me.

Of an evening I would tell Henry what I had noticed during the day, though he never seemed very interested. 'Gordon looks more like a rag-bag than a man,' I told him. And then I tried to tell him about the woman. 'She's nothing but a hussy,' I said one night, 'and the most slovenly housekeeper you ever saw. And she drinks beer, too, any old time of the day or night, out on the back porch, if the fancy takes her, in plain sight of God and man.'

'It's not *men* that take a sight on her,' Henry answered. 'It's all of you nosey women. I can't guarantee what God does, but I'll wager he's too busy for petty spying.' I told Henry he was the most vexing man in Fort Union, but he just went out on the porch without replying.

'Why don't you go to call and see for yourself?' That's what Henry said every time I speculated about the purpose of the strangers in staying with Gordon.

Henry must have forgotten, in the years Gordon had been away, that none of us up on the Drive had ever been on calling-terms with him. It was Cora we'd gone to visit with—at times when Gordon wasn't there. Besides not wanting to get mixed up with those strangers, I knew that Gordon, unless his attitude to his neighbors had changed, would give me no welcome.

Gordon had never been neighborly. He had always lived exactly as he pleased. Cora's money had made that possible, though it never seemed to give her any hold over him. When he was a young man, so I've heard, Gordon inherited his father's business, which he paid no attention to, and some money that he soon frittered away. Cora Hanmer put up with a lot. I suppose she did it for the sake of her two children. She tried to keep up a front, poor woman, though the whole town knew about Gordon's carrying-on. *He* didn't care. The worse people thought of him, the more he enjoyed it. There had never been the like of him in our town, and when he was young he kept the whole place in a swivet, getting himself turned out of the country club, being arrested for driving while under the influence, as the saying goes; forever making a show of himself, drinking and brawling and getting into some kind of trouble. Fort Union is a small place, slow-moving, some call it, with nobody very rich or high-living in it. Gordon acted like something out of a Hollywood movie and he relished the town's disapproval. He went away often on trips to California or New York, spending plenty on himself, as usual, instead of keeping up his house or sending his boy to college. When he was home he'd have parties that lasted for three or four days at a time, with friends he'd brought to town with him—all kinds of riff-raff, baseball players and show-girls or traveling men he'd met on trains; once he had part of a vaudeville troupe come to stay and another time, I recall, he hired a dance band to play at the house every night for a week. Gordon had special food sent from down South, things with outlandish names, rich and spicy. And he would be drunk for days on end.

After one of these bouts, he'd go to bed with the shades drawn. Cora had to put ice-packs on his head and take him tea and toast. Then she would set about cleaning up the house, trying to wash out the taste of those parties as if they'd never happened. That wasn't all Cora had to put up with. Sometimes Gordon would bring a girl back from one of his trips with him. Bright-blonde, brash creatures, they were, they all looked alike, but it was a different one every time. If he ran into some of his neighbors, he'd introduce us, saying the girl was his niece. He knew we weren't taken in any and that pleased him all the more. 'Haven't I got a lot of nieces!' he said to me once, laughing. After that, if I saw him downtown, I used to cross to the other side of the street.

Gordon lived like that for fifteen years or so, until he was too worn out for any more parties or nieces. Then he sat around the house, getting waited on like an invalid and thinking up nasty things to do, like tormenting the boy's dog or clipping off Cora's roses when they were still in bud. . . . Yes, Cora had a lot to put up with. She was a saint if ever there was one. She stood it until her children were grown. She sent the girl east to live with a relative and the boy went to Utah to learn his uncle's business. Neither of them ever came back to Fort Union. The son got to be his uncle's partner and is quite well off, I've heard; the daughter married and has children of her own, the oldest nearly Marge's age. I can't recall the name of the man she married or where they settled. Cora must have put all her strength into getting her boy and girl fixed in life and away from Gordon: for after that she just kind of gave up and faded away. She'd done all she could.

If you hadn't known a thing about Gordon you could have read his life in his face. He had never been what you'd call a nice-featured man, even in the days, when he was younger, before he came to live on the Drive. He was short and heavy-set, with a rather large head. I remember he had a jumble of red veins on his nose that had burst through the skin from underneath. But those last months before Cora died, when I was next-door so much helping to nurse her, I could hardly bear to look at him. His face was the color of a piece of pie-crust that isn't baked yet and there were big, brown-stained patches under his eyes. Marge came home one day crying. 'He pinched me on the fanny,' she said. Well, I thought, that's all there is left he *can* do, the nasty, dirty thing. 'Gordon was always a mean man,' I told Marge. 'He likes to hurt people.' That wasn't the reason for his pinching her, I knew well enough, but it was no fib, either. I put the Hanmer house out of bounds for Marge.

All that was a long time ago. We weren't sorry to see Gordon go and while he was away we'd half forgotten him. It was the surprise of our lives when he came back.

The dark woman looked like she was a match for Gordon, if anybody could be, but sometimes I got to wondering about that boy and why he was there. At times I had a strong urge to get friendly with him. Not that he ever showed any signs, himself, of being neighborly, but I had an odd fancy that he was like some wild creature—that he was afraid, but might be gentled, perhaps, if anyone put out a hand to him.

All the same, I decided it wouldn't do to be impulsive. Before getting mixed up with strangers and goodness knows what, I had the rest of my family to consider and the opinion of the neighbors.

IV. Larry

Now that Margaret comes up to the old summer house each evening to talk to me, there are many things to tell her. As we sit on the stone steps, watching the fierce, early August sunsets, I feel stirring within her the questions, held back by a delicacy beyond her years, which she would like to ask me. I no longer turn away from Fort Union to look off toward Wheatville: Margaret prefers to watch the descendent rays blazing on the mountain, where the snow is gradually melting in the summer's heat, shriveling upwards until it has become no more than a white, peaked cap. As the sun sinks lower, a pleasant coolness comes to our hilltop and Margaret's conversation is underlined by the last notes of the birds and, later, the antiphonal monotony of the katydids.

Margaret tells me of her daily life, of her childhood years, or she speaks of her friends whom, she says, I will get to know in the fall, when they return from camp. Though Margaret does not ask the questions I sense in her, her curiosity is the normal one, I realize, which one friend would bear toward another. After she has gone home again in the late dusk, I stay on, thinking of my own childhood, piecing together my memories, picking out which facts I can tell her now, which must be saved until later when she is grown-up enough to understand them.

My first thought is of Lottie: I remember when she told me to call her by that name. It was when she started taking me to the beer parlor over here in Fort Union with her. I must have been about twelve years old at the time. The bartender and the men loafing around the place used to tease her by calling me her boy friend. She said no, I was her kid brother. In spite of my lameness I was tall for my age and she looked too young, anyhow, to be my mother. Although she claimed that the easy life she was leading since her marriage to Joe had made her put on weight, I would not have wanted her to be different. She made all the women in Wheatville look pale and scraggy. . . . So she said we were brother and sister; she told me to call her Lottie and sometimes she would call me Larry, the nickname, never used until then, which I had chosen for myself long before.

I liked the drive over to Fort Union. The spruce woods on the ridge smelled cool and spicy after the flat grain fields of Tuolumne. But it was dingy, sitting in the dark, musty beer hall while there was daylight outside. It gave Lottie pleasure, though, enough to last her until the next trip. She would stay for two hours or so, having a few beers, joking with the bartender and playing the slot machines. Lottie did not care for movies, the chief amusement of the other women in Wheatville: 'After you've seen a real show, kid,' she would say, 'movies are flat.' Though I understood that I must not tell where we went ('It would make talk,' Lottie said, 'and that would provoke Joe'), I could see no harm in our outings. 'Getting away a couple of times a week keeps me from busting loose,' Lottie explained, 'keeps me married to this tank town.'

Lottie made fun of the town, although she said that she was settled in it for life. 'A living death,' she called it, laughing. Lottie was always ready, in those days, to laugh at herself, at her troubles or her boredom. 'Here I am and here I'll stay,' she would add. Consequently, when she told me, this spring, that she was going to live in Fort Union, I was astonished. She and Joe had lived in Wheatville ever since their marriage (Joe had never been out of Tuolumne County: he's that sort of man), and my sisters were born there.

Lottie's husband is not my father and I was born somewhere else—where, she would never tell me, giving me teasing answers, saying, one day, Denver, the next, Chicago or Los Angeles, cities I would have preferred to our smug little farm-town. Lottie had undoubtedly been to all those places, for she would describe them, when she saw my interest, vividly and in detail. Those hours we spent together, the afternoon hours between school and supper, filled with Lottie's reminiscences, were the times when we were both happy. But at the end of each story, Lottie would laugh, saying, 'What's the good of telling you these things? You live in Wheatville, kid, and probably always will.'

I did not know any place other than Wheatville, for I was too young, when Lottie brought me there, to remember where we had lived before —and exactly how young I was I do not know, either, for she would not tell me my age. But when she used to laugh at me for being stuck in Wheatville, I never resented it: it was her way of sharing her own restlessness with me. There were many things that we shared, things my two sisters and their father could never have understood.

Lottie met *my* father in a circus. He was a knife-thrower. She ran away with him and learned to be his assistant; together they toured the whole country. No one in Wheatville, of course, knew anything of Lottie's past life. We used to laugh, Lottie and I, imagining the expressions on the neighbors' faces if they were to find out she had been in a circus. Now she was Mrs. Gates, housewife to Joe Gates, hardware merchant of Wheatville, Tuolumne County, with two daughters who went to Valley High, who liked movies and icecream sodas and would probably marry farmers. I was her only reminder of her former life, I realized, her only link with it, and she grew more and more dependent on me as a companion.

But I had no memories to amuse me, as Lottie did, nor her ability to laugh at what I did not like: I had nothing to remember and little to look forward to. The natives called Lottie a foreigner, but I felt less at home there than she did. Joe tolerated me because I was her son; he had adopted me and given me his name. Still, I knew that he would never do more for me than give me a home and clothes until I was old enough to go to work. And though I did not know what my own name was, I did not want his.

Gates and Company, General Merchandise and Farm Implements, sounds important, but Margaret, as I have told her when describing the town to her, would laugh to see the store. Wheatville is a town in name only: it is one dusty street flanked by the post office and a gas station and three stores, with the houses straggling off on either side.

By the time I finished grammar school, the natives had forgotten that I was adopted and took me for granted. They accepted me as the town oddity; and pointing me out to strangers as 'Lorenzo, that funny Gates boy' added to the satisfaction they found in their own sameness and normality. But I never made friends among them; I could not forget the cruel teasing of my school-mates, and they did not forget that my appearance set me apart from them. Ruby and Hazel, my two sisters, were ashamed of me for being different from other boys. They were as much strangers to me as all the others: they talked only of games or the incidents of their class-rooms; later, of movies or the boys they giggled with at the soda-fountain. And in this way I came to rely on Lottie's friendship with a dependence which equaled her own.

But in time I found another friend: old Mr. Lessing, the caretaker at the grain elevator. The natives called him Pop and considered him eccentric. He lived in a one-room bungalow behind the post office where he had fitted up his work-shop. Mr. Lessing had a wooden leg —the result of the construction accident which had caused him to give up active engineering. Perhaps that was why he had first felt friendly to me: we shared the jeers of the town children. They would throw cans and rocks at his cats, inviting him to come out and try to chase them away. 'Here comes Peg-leg!' they'd shout. 'Get a move on, Pop.' When, occasionally, we'd walk out to the grain elevator together, we must have looked freakish, one hobbling, the other limping; but there being two of us was a comfort to me.

Mr. Lessing was the only person I ever told about my leg, about how I became crippled. I wasn't always like this. When Lottie brought me to Wheatville, when she married Joe Gates, both my legs were straight and even. I don't remember that, but I can remember how the accident occurred. Anytime I want to recall it, it's there, behind my eyelids, complete and like a set of pictures.

I was three or four years old at the time. Ruby had been born a few weeks before. In his new pride, Joe had given Lottie a horse and buggy —she had hankered after having a horse, she has told me, for a long time. (That was in the days before cars.) Lottie grew fretful at being kept indoors, still weak from Ruby's birth, and one afternoon, before she had the strength for it, she slipped out of the house and hitched up the buggy. She gave the horse a lash with the whip and it started to bolt. Lottie cried out. I was playing in the yard; when I heard her scream I ran toward her, thinking to help her. I was knocked down and the buggy wheels ran over my foot.

When I had told Mr. Lessing about my leg, he said, 'It seems important now, because two legs are part of a boy's necessary equipment. But when you're grown up, it won't be. What's important then is some common sense and the knowledge of how to live as suits you best.' He told me I should find a vocation I liked and learn about it. 'When you're a man,' he said, 'knowing a useful trade is more important than a leg.'

After I started high school, Mr. Lessing said he was tired of having me underfoot, afternoons, getting in his way and asking questions. 'I shall teach you properly, boy, or not at all,' he said. He arranged for me to spend five afternoons a week in his work-room, where he taught me all that I was capable of learning. One day he began to speak of my future: 'You've shown your aptitude for mechanics,' he said. 'Now we must plan how you're to go on with your studies.'

'What future?' I asked him resentfully—he knew my situation well enough. 'What future? Working in Joe's store or maybe the gas station? There aren't any futures in this dump.'

'You're only sneering at yourself, boy,' Mr. Lessing said. 'Nobody's forcing you to stay in Wheatville.'

I often speak of Mr. Lessing to Margaret, until she has come to know his habits and turn of mind almost as well as I did myself. But, at these times, all the things I cannot tell her are made sharper by contrast. . . . Lottie never cared for my friend. She said Mr. Lessing was an old crackpot and that he smelled bad. 'What do you want to hang around that pig-pen of his for?' she asked. 'Better to get out in the fresh air.' Thinking how carefully Lottie herself avoided the outdoors made me laugh. But Lottie's customary laughter did not come in reply; she forbade me to go to the workroom again. It was the first time she had put herself in authority over me; and, for the first time, I went against her wishes. I continued with my lessons even after she cut off my pocket-money in retaliation, so that I had to work at the gas pump, evenings, when I needed to buy books or equipment. Lottie listened with sullen disapproval to my explanation of Mr. Lessing's teaching, and our friendly hours together were spoiled.

Mr. Lessing continued to plan for my future and, during my final year in high school, he told me that he had decided to send me to college, to the Engineering School in Fort Union. He had put the money aside, from one of his patents, he said, to pay for my fees, while I was to work for my board and room.

That was last winter. During the cold spell we had, Mr. Lessing got pneumonia and died. He was too old to fight off his illness; he became delirious and in three days he was dead. A daughter whom no one in Wheatville had seen or heard of came and claimed his property. (Lottie was unkind about it. 'So your old Pop's dead,' she said. She sounded glad, and on her face was a hard, closed-in expression I had never seen before.) With my friend gone, I had no means of going ahead with my training, and Wheatville became a lonelier and even more confining place.

As I think back now, I see that Lottie had begun to change. All those years, she had been going along as usual, keeping herself amused as best she could with her memories of the past and her trips to Fort Union, laughing at herself when she was bored. But during that winter she became very dispirited. She no longer cared to talk about old times and when I spoke of them, trying to re-establish our comradeship, she looked at me as if I were a stranger. One day she took all the old photographs which had filled so many of our afternoons with intimacy and enjoyment, and burned them in the stove. She gave up her trips to Fort Union, instead staying in her room all day, drinking beer and never getting dressed until supper-time.

Ruby was growing up, getting her hair frizzed at the beauty parlor and beginning to go out with boys. Lottie looked at her with hatred and spoke sarcastically to her. Joe grumbled ceaselessly at Lottie's slovenliness and disagreeable temper. They quarreled every night; Lottie would shout at him and throw dishes on the floor, while the neighbors stood on their porches, listening. The girls were frightened and hid in my room from the sounds of Lottie's anger, but I did not know how to comfort them, for I did not understand her myself.

It was about that time that I began to wonder who I was: I, too, changed. Always it had been like a game, speculating on the identity of my father and the place of my birth. But that winter I began to have disturbing thoughts. Terrible ideas came to me: was he an Indian, I wondered, transmitting to me my dark hair and alien face? I wanted to know where he came from. Was he still alive?—even that I did not know. Or, a thought more terrible, which I tried to bury in a deep pocket of my mind, had he and Lottie been married at all? did I even possess a name?

Often I would dream I was in an empty field without end or boundary, where nothing grew but burnt stubble and no human life could exist. A man would appear far off in the field, a very dark man, dressed in ragged, dirty clothes, closely resembling one of the Indians I had seen the year before out on the Reservation. The man walked toward me very slowly but, however slowly he approached, I could never get away, for my lame foot seemed to be chained to the earth. As the man came nearer he started to throw knives at me, many knives with bright, sharp blades. At last I would catch one of them. It would cut my hand open and I could see the bright, sticky blood flowing from it, but there was no sensation of pain. Then I would clasp the knife firmly by its hilt and kill him with it. While I was killing him the man would stare at me with a hard, cruel smile, and, as he died, I would remember the way Lottie had looked when she spoke of Mr. Lessing's death; sometimes I thought that it was not the man I killed, but Lottie herself. After waking, I would be unable to rid myself of the terror I had felt in the nightmare.

I asked Lottie to tell me the answers it was necessary for me to know, but, now that she had changed, she refused to talk about my father at all. Instead she would give me a look of dislike and say, 'Wouldn't you like to know?' It was as if, in turning against me, she had turned against herself as well.

In the spring the letters began coming from a place in California. Lottie had never received any personal mail for as long as I could remember. Now she watched eagerly for her letters and locked herself in her room when she answered them. Soon another change came over her. She dressed carefully each morning, she tended the house and became more even-tempered. She was pleasant to Joe, not in her former manner, but as though he were too unimportant to bother with.

After a trip to Fort Union she came home dressed in new clothes and with her hair done in a new style. She went upstairs and called me to her room. Her eyes were sparkling; she looked young and high-spirited, as she had when first she started calling me her kid brother and taking me out with her.

'How would you like to go and live in Fort Union, kid?' she asked. It was impossible to believe Joe would move away: I knew she must have some plan of her own.

'It's easy enough to get out of a place once you fix your mind to it,' she said. She went to the window and pulled the curtain aside. I saw that she had had red stuff put on her finger-nails. 'Look at that,' she said, pointing. *'Hickville!'* In her tone was what she thought of the place and the people in it. 'Why should I stay here and rot? I must've been crazy.'

'I'll bet you've been over to the beer hall,' I said to her. But when I looked at her again, I knew it was not that kind of stimulation which was changing her. She looked younger and refreshed, as though recently wakened from an afternoon sleep, but I distrusted her new mood. 'You always said you were settled here for life,' I said. She shrugged and I saw that she had made up her mind. I asked, 'What are you planning?'

'Living again! And I'll take you out of this hole with me.' Lottie sat down on her bed and looked at me, calculating, I thought, what to tell me. 'You're a good kid, you can have your chance, too.'

'You mean that I could go to Engineering School?' I asked.

Lottie promised that I could. She told me briefly her plans: that she was going to take care of an elderly relative, an invalid who had no one to look after him.

'But what about Joe?' I asked her. 'He'll never let you do it.'

'If I never see Joe Gates *or* his kids again, it won't be a year too soon,' she answered.

I looked at her suspiciously. I did not believe her story. Exchanging her life in Wheatville with Joe for one in Fort Union nursing an invalid had little to recommend itself to her. But when she repeated her promise to send me to college, I forgot my doubts in preoccupation with my own plans.

Soon Lottie told Joe her bare, unbelievable plan, and as she spoke to him, she laughed, not caring whether he approved or not. They slipped easily into one of their habitual, loud quarrels, which ended when Joe left the house, saying that he would be glad when she was gone.

The next morning Lottie finished her packing and we set out for Fort Union. When she returned from California, bringing Gordon Hanmer with her, I knew that I should never have let her come here. She and Mr. Hanmer watch each other like two snakes, waiting to see which one will strike first. In the evenings he calls to her to come and sit beside him; he holds her hand, he puts his other hand on her thigh or strokes her neck. His hands have too much skin on them. On each of his fingers the skin hangs in little bags, puffed out where the joints should be, as if there were no bones underneath; on the backs of his hands are brown spots like the flat, swollen toad-stools which spring up after a rain. When he sees me looking at his hands, he smiles, saying, 'Would you deprive a dying man of his one little pleasure, Lorenzo?' Lottie sits quietly beside him, the smile on her lips reflecting his.

On the hilltop I am able to forget about Gordon Hanmer and the other parts of my life which have so long mystified and shamed me.

When I tell Margaret about Mr. Lessing and my work in the room near the post office, she gives me the confidence I need to carry out my plans for the future. Lottie has forgotten her promise to send me to college—lately I realize that she never meant it. Though I know that it is wrong for her to stay here, she refuses to leave Mr. Hanmer's house, and so I must go alone. The incentive I find in discussing the future with Margaret is equaled by the pleasure I take in her descriptions of her everyday life. The events of her commonplace existence are more affecting than the stories of past adventures with which Lottie used to entertain me; through Margaret's matter-of-fact phrases, I share with her the ordinary, secure childhood I had always wanted for myself.

V. Mrs. Ayers

THAT was a most unseasonable summer. We sweltered through August, the heat never relenting for a minute. In the old days, when Cora was stil alive, Gordon had often amused himself by making fun of the town and its ways. Fort Union is called a slow town, often enough, by those who leave it for other places, and the reason they give is its dampness. Thirty miles from the sea, and in the center of a river valley, surrounded by hills and mountains, naturally we have a mild, rainy climate. 'The pioneers ran out of food,' I remember Gordon saying, 'and had to stop thirty miles too soon.' But as I watched him grow feebler through the weeks, I thought to myself that he had found the place good enough, after all, to come home and die in.

But the summer that Gordon came back there was no dampness. There was only the heat, beating down on us, drying up the river itself and, along with it, all the crops and our own spirits. The other side of the hills, we could see from the top of our ridge, there was a true drought, the grain burning up in its fields. I've never known such a taxing summer. The people next door were part and parcel of it, too—added to the cranky feeling in the air. It was Henry's worst year in the office; he couldn't send Marge to camp, he couldn't even take us to the beach for more than one measly week at the end of August. With the Purdy boys away, and all her other playmates, Marge lazed through the summer, a dreamy look in her eyes, mooching around the house all day and in the evenings, after supper, going off by herself for a walk, never saying where she'd been or why.

One night I couldn't stand things any longer. I was exasperated by the heat and by the spoiled dessert—the cake, like it was bewitched, fell while I was taking it out of the oven; and when Henry answered my speculations on the day's doings next door with his usual remark ('Why don't you go and see for yourself?'), I said, 'That's what I will do, right this minute!' It wasn't till I got home again that I realized how ridiculous I must have looked, with my old house-dress on and, to top it off, my good straw with the wreath of flowers on it and, no doubt, my face red from the kitchen work. I just popped out the back door and walked over to the Hanmer house without giving myself time to think. When I rapped on their door the dark woman came to the kitchen right away, almost as if she'd been expecting me. She looked at me through the pane of glass in the top of the door (she still hadn't got the curtain up)—and again I had the feeling that she was laughing at me. She smiled, but her face seemed to me to have less of friendliness or even amusement than any smile I had ever seen. Then she pulled the door open abruptly and called out to Gordon, 'You have company.' Even her voice mocked at me.

She walked out of the kitchen without another word, without looking to see if I was behind her. For a minute I wanted to go home again, but it was too late to turn back, so I followed her into the parlor. Gordon was sitting in the brown easychair, his legs wrapped in an afghan. The lamplight shone on his face and I was shocked at this close view of him. His skin, pasty enough before, had a dead-looking pallor and his lips were blue-rimmed. I could tell he was mighty sick.

I looked around the room, realizing I hadn't been in the house since Cora's funeral. It was remarkable how little that woman had changed the place. The room was clean and tidy (I presume that was the boy's handiwork), but it was as if nobody was living there—as if the house was opened up just for a few days.

'So it's Mrs. Ayers,' Gordon said, 'the good friend of my departed wife.' His voice was soft, with something hidden under its softness, like a cat's claws hidden under its pads. I remembered it had always sounded like that. He motioned to the dark woman. 'Come and stand beside me, my dear,' he said. 'You must meet your neighbor, Lottie,' he said to her. 'You must have been curious about her all summer.' Then he laughed. 'Not as curious as she was about you, however, you may be sure.'

As Gordon spoke, I forgot the pity I ought to have felt for a dying man, and felt only the queer sickliness there in that room; it was as real and as thick as smoke.

'No doubt the whole Drive must be buzzing about my return,' Gordon went on, 'and about Mrs. Gates, here, too—about her position in my household.' He laughed again, a mean, nasty sort of sound. 'Her position is quite respectable, I'm afraid.'

I began to blush, like some silly girl, with embarrassment, but they didn't see me. They were looking at each other in a peculiar way, watching each other for some reason I couldn't make out. 'I must be going,' I said. The room was so stuffy, with all the windows closed, that I thought I might come over faint.

Gordon held up one hand, stopping me. 'But you mustn't think of going until you've found out what you want to know,' he said. 'My Good Samaritan,' he went on, nodding at that woman, 'was dear Cora's cousin, brought up in the same house with her, in fact—more years ago than any of us would care to remember. When she heard, quite by chance, that I had no one to look after me, she consented to come and look after my declining years,' he said, laughing, 'of which, she trusts, there won't be a great many.'

Gordon talked on in that soft, purring voice, seeming to praise the woman, but managing at the same time, so it seemed to me, to sound sarcastic. I couldn't make head nor tail of the situation. Gordon hadn't even asked me to sit down—kept me standing there as he would a tramp at his back door—but I knew he'd go on till he was good and ready to stop. I was so fidgety I couldn't take in half what he was saying.

'You've changed, Mrs. Ayers,' he said. 'Cora used to enjoy your loquacity, but tonight you've scarcely spoken.'

'I must be getting along,' I said. 'We're going away for a week tomorrow, going to the beach. . . .'

Before I could finish my sentence, Gordon—as if I'd be wanting to tell *him* about my plans—interrupted me, saying, 'Lottie can tell you that I'm a very ill man, much too ill to hear about holidays at the beach.'

If that wasn't Gordon all over! When I'd wanted to go he wouldn't let me: but when *he* was through talking, he dismissed me like the hired help.

That woman hadn't uttered a word since she called out to Gordon, from the kitchen, that I was there. As I let myself out their back door, I realized I'd forgotten to ask about the boy. In fact, I wasn't much the wiser than before I'd gone to call. I was put out with myself for getting so flustered.

I hurried home to tell Henry what had happened. He took one look at me and said, 'You must be annoyed over something—your chin's wobbling.'

That was the finishing touch. 'That Gordon Hanmer!' I said. 'He acted like he hardly knew me. Snubbed his nextdoor neighbor, that's what he did!' No wonder I was put out. I decided against asking Henry what that word, loquacity, meant—not while he was in his present mood.

'Maybe he thinks you haven't acted very neighborly,' Henry said. He spoke so mildly that it was a further aggravation.

'I was right not to!' I answered him. 'That woman! You know what Gordon said?'

'Now, how can I know?' Henry asked, provoking me more.

I paid him no heed and went on telling him what had occurred. 'He said she's his relative. Or rather, that she was Cora's relative—a cousin that grew up with her. Some kind of poor relation, I don't doubt. And now, Gordon says, this woman offered to come and look after his declining years. Those were his own words: "Look after my declining years, of which she hopes there won't be many." Now, what do you make of that?' Henry took a long puff on his pipe, filling the room with the smell of it, though he knows how I dislike it, and didn't say anything. 'I never heard of poor Cora having any cousin,' I went on. 'It's some scheming adventuress, that's my opinion.'

'What's she scheming to do?' Henry asked, just to rile me. 'Steal the silver?'

'You can sit there and make fun of me all you want, Henry Ayers,' I said. 'But you'll see if I'm not right.'

Henry leaned back and puffed on his pipe. I didn't reproach him because he looked, for a change, as if he might say something to the point. The springs in his chair creaked as he settled down for a comfortable bit of reminiscence. 'You wouldn't remember,' he began, 'for it all took place before your folks came to Fort Union. She was a wild one, that cousin,' Henry told me. 'An orphan, without a penny to her name. I don't recall where she came from. The year Cora got herself engaged to Gordon, this cousin that I speak of must have been about sixteen. She was pretty as sin and all the boys were after her even then. When Cora married Gordon, though, she ran off and I never did hear what became of her. Some said she had been figuring on marrying Gordon herself.'

'You sound like *you* were one of those boys,' I said sharply.

'Yes, it could be that cousin,' Henry said. He seemed to peer back into his memory. 'She might be.'

'You just keep away from her, Henry Ayers!' I said.

'Oh, for the Lord's sake!' he exclaimed, sounding disgusted with me. 'I wish they'd all three go away so that you'd quit fussing and spying.' He picked up his tobacco jar and went outside.

VI. Larry

THE moon rose late that night. The sky was clear and the moon, nearly full, had clear, sharp edges; shining in my bedroom window, it looked very close. Margaret had told me, earlier in the evening, that she would be going away until after Labor Day, and already I felt lonely, the sense of solitude increased, by the cool, impersonal moonlight, to the point of wakefulness. Margaret and I had stayed on the hilltop until after dark, for we had many things to talk over before she left the next morning. When I came back to the house, Lottie was standing in the sitting-room doorway, waiting for me. 'Keep away from that girl!' she said.

I was too surprised to answer. Lottie spoke on, anger in her eyes and voice. I learned that she had known for some time of my meetings with Margaret, spying on me just as Mrs. Ayers, whose curiosity she derided, had spied on us. For the first time, I wished that I could have kept a part of my life secret from Lottie. Her anger was cold and her words came out slowly and precisely, as though she were considering, before each one, how much hurt she could put into it. Suddenly I was reminded, by its similarity, of her expression when she had spoken against Mr. Lessing. Standing there in the doorway, Lottie was so tall, so heavily fleshed, so swollen with her anger and jealousy, that she seemed to me too big, too dark, too fleshy to be regarded as natural or familiar. All the years I had lived with her, feeling that our isolation from others was fitting and almost enjoyable, appeared to me now to have been as confining as a cage.

When she had finished letting out her anger, Mr. Hanmer came up, his dragging feet helped on by his cane, and stood beside her. His cheeks bagged at every step and the shawl cloaking his shoulders straggled down his back. 'This has been an eventful evening, my boy,' he said. (He always talked in that fashion.) He put one of his hands on my shoulder, smiling, as usual, when I flinched away from his soft, dying touch. 'First our visitor, Mrs. Ayers, from next door. . . .'

'That prying bitch!' Lottie exclaimed.

'Your mother does not care for our neighbors. She thinks that you, too, ought to realize that we three are a family unit, sufficient unto ourselves.' Mr. Hanmer smiled again, his heavy, bluish lips twisting grotesquely. I was astonished to learn that Mrs. Ayers, after leaving us alone all summer, had decided to come over; and I wondered anxiously if she, as well as Lottie, had discovered that Margaret had made friends with me. But I knew that Mr. Hanmer, if he sensed my misgivings, would not tell me the purpose of her visit, so I said nothing.

'After our neighbor left, we had another visitor,' he continued. I thought at once of Hazel or Ruby, but he anticipated my thought, saying, 'No, it was not one of your sisters—or, I should say, your *half*-sisters. It was merely a messenger boy, bringing us tidings from the outer world. We are to expect another visitor, however: my son, my devoted firstborn.' Mr. Hanmer stopped to laugh. 'A crow, delegate of other crows,' he said. 'That is why I urge our closeness as a little family. When he comes, let him find himself an interloper.' Still laughing softly to himself, Mr. Hanmer wobbled down the hall to his bedroom, leaning on Lottie, not only for help, but because he knew the sight of their closeness disgusted me.

When I had first come to bed, I had thought for a time of Lottie's angry words and of Mr. Hanmer's ambiguous ones. But the life in this house was no longer mine. Lottie's anger, so disproportionate and unjust, had freed me from my final reluctance to leave her. She and Mr. Hanmer could stay here, hating each other and relishing their hatred, without me.

Now I knew firmly what I would do—Margaret and I had talked about it that evening on the hill. . . . She had run quickly up the path, eager to hear my news. A few days before I had written to the Dean of the Engineering School and he had made an appointment to see me that morning. 'What happened?' Margaret called out. Her enthusiasm made me very happy, and I walked into the clearing to meet her, no longer attempting to conceal my limp. 'Well?' she asked impatiently. 'He was awfully nice to me,' I said. 'Dean Rivers, his name is. He talked to me for a whole hour, asking about my training and everything. And then he gave me an application to fill out. Here—I brought a copy of it.' I showed Margaret the form. 'I don't understand half of it,' she said, 'but I do know it was a good thing you went down there.'

In my hopelessness after Mr. Lessing's death, it had not occurred to me that his training might have fitted me for a scholarship: that had been Margaret's idea. Weeks ago she had asked me why I did not apply for one, and since then I had studied each night after going back to the house.

'And that's not all!' I told Margaret. 'The Dean says he thinks I have a good chance—and tomorrow I take the first exam.'

'That's swell!' Margaret said. 'I know you'll make it. Now you'll have to think of some way you can earn your room and board, the way Fran Wallace's brother did.' The practical side of Margaret's nature was as much help to me, in planning for my independence, as her encouragement. I told her that I would speak to the Dean about a place to live; meanwhile there were my savings—nearly eighty dollars, kept from the presents Mr. Lessing had given me from time to time.

Lying in bed, I thought over all Margaret had said, and I thought of the future, of the time when I might respect myself for the work I could do. When my training was finished, I could be Margaret's friend openly; I would make other friends, too, and some day I would be able to forget that I was different from other people. I decided that it did not matter what name I had. Larry Gates, I said to myself, repeating it until it was easy to say and natural.

In the silent house, the sound of steps on the stairs were loud. I did not know what time it was, or whether I had dozed off for a while; but my usual curiosity about Lottie's activities had drained away. All that remained was a faint amusement: how like her, I thought drowsily, to try to sneak downstairs in those slippers—mules, she called them—when their loose heels clacked on every tread, announcing her movements for her. She's gone for her beer, I thought. I turned on my side, away from the window, sleepy at last. Lottie often got up in the middle of the night, clattered down to the kitchen, turning on all the switches, sending out blazing squares of light into the quiet night. It was nothing to stay awake about. Sometimes she would go to sit in Mr. Hanmer's room, from where I could hear their voices, if I happened to waken, raised in talk and laughter, until the sky was grey with the beginning of morning.

But tonight there was no sound. I do not know how long I had been asleep before the unusual silence disturbed me and I was fully awake, straining to hear an accustomed noise.

I got up and went into the hall, to the door of Lottie's bedroom and looked in. It was the room which had belonged to Mr. Hanmer's wife; Lottie lived there now, at home amongst another's possessions. The moonlight showed me an empty bed with the covers tossed back. The silver-mounted brushes on the dressing-table glinted; they were initialed with the letters C H, and scattered about the room were framed pictures of people I had never seen. I wondered how Lottie could be at ease, living with a dead woman's mementoes. The soft chime of Mrs. Hanmer's porcelain clock struck against the silence with three notes. The air was heavy, for Lottie never opened the windows even in summer, and the stale scent of many cigarettes mingled with her Chypre perfume. Through the bay window, I could see the front of the Ayers house, dark and asleep the way a house should be. For a moment I thought with joy of going away: some day I would have a house, myself, like that one next door—it would be neat and fresh-painted, the grass would be trimmed, the flower-beds precise; a house like anyone else's.

There was no movement downstairs and Lottie did not come back. With reluctance I left her room and went to look for her, my bare feet soundless on the stairs. At the end of the narrow hall leading to the back of the house, Mr. Hanmer's door was closed and Lottie was standing in front of it. Her arms, white in the moonlight illuminating her from the kitchen window, were crossed tightly before her, the long sleeves of her kimono hanging slackly away from them; her black hair, freed from its coil, hung richly to her waist. A strange feeling came over me: I thought that she looked very beautiful and that I would like to get away from her; but this passed in a moment. Lottie stood very still, as if she were listening, and in that ghostly light she seemed to be smiling. When she saw me there, she screamed.

I stepped to the kitchen doorway and turned on the light. It glared cruelly into her eyes, their pupils dilated from the dark. I saw that her face was pale and that she was trembling, but whether from fear or excitement was not apparent.

'What are you doing here?' I asked her.

Lottie laughed, a senseless sound in the quiet. 'I was just going to call you,' she said. 'Gordon is dead.' She put her hand on the knob of the door, not to open it, but to keep it shut. Below her hand, coming through the door, which was not, as I had thought at first, entirely closed, was a narrow piece of tubing which wound, like a long, coral-colored snake, down to the floor and across it. I followed the coil out to the kitchen where I saw that it was attached to the disused gas-bracket beside the doorway. I recognized it as the rubber tubing which had once been part of a shower-spray. The end of the tube was over the gas outlet and the jet was turned full on.

With a cry I turned off the gas and pulled the obscene tube down, flinging it away from me onto the floor, and ran back into the hall. I pushed Lottie away and opened the door of Mr. Hanmer's room, but she clung to my arm, dragging against me as I tried to cross the room to the window. 'He cheated me before and I wasn't going to let him do it again!' she said, repeating her words over and over as she clutched my arm.

I threw the window full open; but it was no use, except for airing the room. Mr. Hanmer was dead.

'He cheated me right from the start,' Lottie said. Her voice was loud in my ears, as she followed me to the bed, and piercingly shrill. 'Right from when he first met me at Cora's house.' She took hold of my shoulder and shook me. 'Can't you understand?' she shouted at me. I tried to push her away, but she clung to me with her full strength. 'I worked hard for all I got in Cora's house,' Lottie shouted. 'Cora's folks never had to keep a hired girl—not with me around the place! And they never let me forget I was living on their charity—never for one minute.'

Mr. Hanmer was lying on his bed, looking no different from the way he had all summer, except that his lips, now, were bluer and a little more flaccid.

Lottie stood beside me, her breath blowing against my cheek, not looking at Mr. Hanmer, but talking, talking as if she would never stop. 'And Cora's folks hated me because I was prettier than she was. She was a few years older than me and turned out very plain—looked like she'd never catch herself a man.'

Mr. Hanmer lay quietly; the other end of the tubing, with its spherical spray still attached to it, like a makeshift cone, was pressed into the pillow near his face.

'Cora's folks thought Gordon was coming to see her,' Lottie said, 'but it was me he fell in love with.' She moved away, back to the doorway, and began speaking more calmly. 'But in the end, Cora had the laugh on me. It was me Gordon loved, but he loved Cora's money better. When they got married I couldn't stand it around here any more, so I beat it out of town—ran away with that fellow from the circus.'

Mr. Hanmer looked as if he had not even wakened to see the cone lying there on the pillow. It had not taken very much to kill him.

'You thought it was all fun, kid, that circus life,' Lottie said. She was leaning heavily against the door-frame, not noticing Mr. Hanmer nor seeming to see me, either, there by his bedside. 'At first it was exciting,' she said softly, 'leading a free and easy life, getting around to new places all the time—thinking of the folks back home, the looks on their faces, if they could see me standing up in tights and spangles, in the middle of the bright lights, with a man throwing knives at me! That's the way I liked to remember it. That's how I *had* to remember it, because it was all I had to look back on.'

I felt for Mr. Hanmer's pulse. I undid his pyjama coat and felt for a heart-beat.

'But after a while it was drudgery,' Lottie said. As she continued to talk, her voice grew indistinct and she sounded very tired. 'Different from living with Cora's folks,' she said, 'but drudgery all the same.'

I raised Mr. Hanmer's body up in the bed and tried to find the moisture of breath on a mirror I had brought from the bureau. His body was still warm. He had only been dead a short while. But it was too late to do anything for him now.

'It was nothing but hard work and not enough to eat,' Lottie was saying, 'and then that man began to treat me mean. I didn't want to go on like that the rest of my life.' She was still leaning against the doorway, looking far off at the things she was trying to remember. 'So I came back here,' she said. 'One day I met Gordon. He told me he had made a mistake, that he didn't care about anybody but me. He found me a little house on the other side of the river and he came to see me as often as he could. No one ever knew. I lived in that little house for three years. I believed all he said—I was a great one for believing in Gordon! When he went on a trip to New York, I didn't even know, at first, that he'd taken a girl from California with him.'

Lottie turned and went out of the room. 'That was the second time he cheated me,' she said.

I laid Mr. Hanmer's body back on the pillows and pulled the covers over him. I went slowly back into the hall, feeling that my foot was dragging, clumsily holding me back. Lottie was sitting on the small chair by the telephone table, in the niche under the stairs. Her body, too big for the chair, was nevertheless slumped there in relaxation. Her lids half obscured her eyes and her hair hung around her shoulders like a thick veil.

'Why?' I asked her. 'Why did you do it?' Lottie did not answer me.

'He was nearly dead, anyhow,' I said. 'Couldn't you wait any longer?' I noticed that I was whispering, but it did not seem out of keeping.

Lottie looked up at me, only then aware that she was not alone. She pulled at the folds of her kimono and took a piece of paper from between her breasts. I saw how heavy they were and I thought, she's getting fat again, it's all that beer. . . .

'Here,' she said. 'You keep this for me, till we decide what to do.'

I did not take the paper. I went up to the telephone table and said, 'I'll call the police now.'

Lottie put her arm out over the phone and laughed. 'You always had your head in the clouds, kid, but I didn't think you'd be this dense.' She shook out the piece of paper with her free hand. 'This is Gordon's will,' she said, 'that he made before I drove him up here from California. Leaving us what he owned.' She looked at the will and smiled. 'When I heard that son of his was coming to visit, I couldn't tell what might happen. Gordon would have thought it a good joke to change it. I wasn't going to let him cheat me again.'

She took hold of my arm, which I had stretched out toward the telephone, and threw it back at my side like something useless and discarded. 'Call the police!' she repeated, mimicking my voice. 'It would only be your story against mine, kid. I'd say you went kind of hay-wire. Maybe you were brooding all summer, I'd say, over the raw deal you've gotten from your father. After all, Gordon's been treating me fine lately, but maybe you didn't think he'd done right by you. . . . Couldn't that be what happened?'

Perhaps it was many minutes before I understood what Lottie was saying. At first I was too shocked and stupid, from seeing what she had done, to hear her. I know that it was quiet in the hall for a long time before the sense of her words began to reach my mind, until I comprehended that now, at last, Lottie was telling me the facts of my birth. Then the pain struck at me and I doubled over, holding my stomach where the spasm was, and fell down on the floor. I saw that tears from my eyes were dampening the dust of the hall carpet. I could not stop crying and lay foolishly on the floor, thinking of Gordon Hanmer and rejecting what Lottie had said. 'You're lying,' I said at last. 'It was the man in the circus.'

'No,' Lottie said. 'No, it wasn't. You were born right here in Fort Union. In the house Gordon rented for me. It was a cute little place—I liked it there.'

'He was crazy about you,' she went on. She appeared to have forgotten about the body, lying there the other side of the wall. 'He said his other children bored him. He praised you for being so dark—"Our son isn't going to look like Cora's pale brats," he used to say. And the presents he brought—nothing was too extravagant. . . .'

She put her elbows on her knees and rested her face on her hands, as though her head felt too heavy. 'I was sixteen or thereabouts, when I first met Gordon,' she said softly. 'I can remember back to that time plainly, but it doesn't seem it was me, doesn't seem anybody could have been that young and silly, so wide-eyed about everything. I used to think I'd get all I wanted out of life. And so many little things gave me pleasure. It's funny to think of. It was like everything I saw or touched or tasted gave me more satisfaction than a fifty-dollar gold-piece.'

Lottie sighed and shifted in her chair. At some point I had stopped crying and begun to listen to her. I sat on the floor, trying to understand what she was saying, trying to piece together what she had told me in the other room, knowing that, for the first time, she was revealing the truth about her life, truth that had been too painful for her to admit, even to herself, before this.

'It was when you were two years old that he went off to New York,' she said. 'The money ran out and he never answered my letters. Then I knew he wasn't coming back. Then I knew he'd cheated me a second time.'

'I took you to Wheatville with me,' Lottie continued. 'I worked at the lunch counter down by the post office. Joe Gates looked pretty good to me after a winter of that, and Wheatville was as good a place as any to wait in.'

She got up and stretched slowly. 'I'm tired,' she said. She prodded me with the toe of her slipper. 'Why don't you get up off of the floor?' she asked. 'There must be a lot of things to tend to.' She went along the hall scuffing her heels and started up the stairs. She climbed upstairs slowly, one foot at a time, dragging the other after her, pulling herself up by the banister. I heard her go into her room and shut the door.

In the early morning I dressed carefully in my good blue suit; it was pressed and ready because I had planned to wear it that day to the Engineering School. At eight o'clock I called Dr. McCabe, who was not at all surprised to hear that Mr. Hanmer had died in his sleep. 'It was only to be expected,' he said. He took his time getting up to the house, took only a few minutes to examine the body. 'It's a wonder Mrs. Gates managed to keep him alive as long as she did,' was his comment. Then he asked after Lottie. She had fallen into a heavy sleep, on going upstairs, from which she had not yet wakened. I told the doctor, however, that she was suffering from shock and had dozed off only at dawn. 'I'll come back later in the day and look her over,' he said. 'She may need a sedative.' He put on his hat. 'She's worn out, poor soul.' All summer Dr. McCabe had been admiring Lottie. She had made fun of him behind his back and, at Mr. Hanmer's prompting, she had imitated his way of patting her hand and speaking to her—Dr. McCabe had called her, unsuitably enough, 'the little woman.' Then she and Mr. Hanmer had laughed together.

'Let her rest,' Dr. McCabe said to me. 'You'd better get someone to help her with the funeral arrangements.'

'If you'll tell me what to do,' I said to him, 'I can see to them later today.'

'That's a good chap,' Dr. McCabe said, patting me on the shoulder. 'I'll arrange about the body and you can go to the undertaker's this afternoon. The casket, you know. Better leave it to me to notify the rest of the family, too. Tell Mrs. Gates to take it easy until the funeral.'

He picked up his bag and opened the door. I decided to tell him my plans. 'I'm going to take my mother back to Wheatville tonight,' I said. 'She'll be better off there.'

After the doctor had gone, I started packing our things and when Lottie came downstairs at noon I was nearly finished. She refused the breakfast I had made for her and sat dully at the kitchen table, stirring her cup of coffee. She had slept in her pink kimono and it was mussed and stale-smelling. Her hair was matted from the heat. She moved listlessly and her face showed wrinkles. I told her about the doctor's visit and about the arrangements I was making, but she scarcely listened. I saw without surprise that she was a middle-aged woman now, tired and no longer interested in anything.

When I heard Margaret's voice calling me, out in front, it was as startling as a stranger's. I stepped out on the disused front porch and looked down at her. She had on a clean, pale yellow wash-dress, the same color as her fine, curly hair. She looked young and fresh. 'We're going now,' she said. 'Mrs. Purdy's coming with us. Mom and Daddy are next door picking her up,' she explained, 'so I had a chance to run over. I'll see you the minute I get back.'

I did not answer, but stood looking at her. 'What's the matter?' she asked.

'Nothing,' I said. 'Except I don't like saying goodbye.'

Margaret laughed. 'Silly!' she said. 'It's only for a week.' She ran down the slope of the garden and when she reached the road she turned and waved. 'Good luck with the exam!' she called out. I watched her until she was out of sight.

Lottie was still sitting in the kitchen. I went up and touched her arm. 'You'd better go upstairs and get dressed now,' I said. I helped her up as gently as I could.

I remembered that I had not destroyed the will yet. I went into the pantry, where I had hidden everything, and took out the will and the shower-spray from behind the canned goods that Lottie had laid by. I burned the will in the sink and washed the ashes down the drain. The rubber tubing no longer looked repulsive to me but was, instead, a symbol of Lottie's ineptness. I had always believed her to be clever and independent, but now I understood that, though she had prided herself on living outside conventions, she was as much trapped by them as those people—like Mrs. Ayers and our neighbors in Wheatville—whom she despised for abiding by them. And she was, besides, rather stupid. No one but Lottie, I reflected, would have tried to kill a man by such a childish and haphazard method. She would always need me, I knew, to look after her.

And even if she did not need me, where else could be my place in the world? Knowing that I was Gordon Hanmer's son made me forever an outcast; her guilt and mine linked us solidly together.

After I had washed out the spray until it was cleansed of the odor of gas, I hung it back in its place in the downstairs bathroom. Then I set about tidying up the house, so that it would be in order, when he came, for Mr. Hanmer's acknowledged son. When the house was closed up again, as it had been the day Lottie drove me up to it, I began loading our suitcases into the car, for I wished to get started back to Wheatville before dark.

VII. Mrs. Ayers

While we were at the beach the weather broke. It rained for two days and on Labor Day turned clear and cool. Driving home, I told Henry I could feel fall in the air. After the change of being surrounded with ocean and sand, it was plain to see, as soon as we reached the river valley again, how cruel the summer had been. The grass was brown and useless-looking, the cattle were bone-thin from trying to graze off it. The river had shrunk in its bed, showing scummy mud-banks that we hadn't seen since the year of the big drought when Marge was a baby. The town hadn't shed the heat of August yet, but as we started up Beechwood Drive I took a deep breath of our nice, clear air and said, 'Thanks be, summer's over.' Nobody answered me. Mrs. Purdy was taking a nap and Henry was paying strict attention to his driving (he urges the car up our hill like it was a team of horses, as I often tell him); Marge was leaning out the window looking up the road. I gave her a nudge with my elbow—'Mooning again!' I said.

But the summer wasn't over. The heat was gone, but all the exasperating things that had taken place on our Drive weren't done with. First hint I had was the Hanmer house looking different from when we had left for the beach. Marge was the one who discovered that it was empty again. She got out of the car ahead of the rest of us; though I called to her and asked her where she thought she was haring off to, she ran right on up the hill. She was back in a few minutes, though, before Henry had the car unloaded, out of breath and with her hair all blown wild, calling out to us as she ran, saying, 'They're gone! The house is closed up!'

Of the provoking happenings that summer, Gordon's dying while we were away was the most provoking of all. To think how I'd watched and waited the whole summer, wondering what was going on next door—and then missed the end! In exactly one week everything had, you might say, come to a climax: Gordon's death and funeral, his son George coming up from Utah to see about the burying and the property, and those queer gypsy-folks moving out. . . . All while I was away! George's visit had been short; we were too late to catch so much as a glimpse of him. Events had occurred so suddenly, they were over so quickly that I felt, when I saw the house shut up again and desolate as before, that I might have dreamed them.

Marge wasn't herself at all. She showed no pleasure at seeing the Purdy boys again, saying she was too old for playing with children any more. 'Children!' I repeated after her. 'I'd like to know what *you* are, miss!' The neighbor boys had been good enough for her to play with ever since she could walk. . . . Now she sat around the house all day, mooning, or went climbing up the hill behind the Hanmer house. 'What do you do up there?' I asked her. But she wouldn't give me a straight answer: 'I look at the view of Wheatville,' she said. What kind of an answer was that? If I pressed her she sulked; sometimes she went up to her room and cried.

It was only little by little that I found out about her friendship with that stranger-boy. First, there was the box on the back porch, laying there when we got home from the beach, with a tame chipmunk in it. Marge said she didn't rightly know where it came from, but she seemed to set great store by it, so I let her keep it. For another thing, she was continually pestering Henry to find out where the strangers had gone. Well, *he* didn't know any more than the rest of us, where they'd come from or where they'd gone to. And then I met Dr. McCabe one day down on Main Street; he told me Marge had been to his office, asking questions —'about the Gates boy,' he said. 'Who?' I asked him. 'Larry,' Dr. McCabe said, 'poor Mrs. Gate's son.' He went on to tell me what a fine woman this Mrs. Gates was and how brave she'd been over Gordon's death. Well! I thought, Every man to his taste, but Dr. McCabe is an old fool. However, I only heard what he said with half an ear, for it came over me then that Marge must have been off making friends with that boy, going behind my back all summer.

It was hard for me to believe that Marge had been sneaky and underhanded. At first I wanted to punish her, but on thinking it over I decided it was too late by then. I blamed myself for not keeping an eye on her better. Most of all, I blamed Henry. 'If she hadn't been here all summer with time hanging on her hands and her playmates away, this never would have happened,' I told him. 'Next summer she'll go to camp,' I said, 'good year in the office or not.'

Henry said there really wasn't any problem now, because the boy was gone. But whatever Henry's opinion, there was a problem: Marge was a sore trial to me. Seemed like I couldn't get her to take an interest in the things she used to like: a new dress or a picnic or a picture show.

Marge was a worry to me all winter long. Piecemeal, I got facts about the boy and his mother out of her. It was as interesting as a story-book, especially the part about the woman having been in the circus once. I kept after Marge, even though she was silly and didn't want to talk about him, until she'd told me everything the boy had said to her. They certainly must have chattered away by the hour, up on their hilltop! It was gratifying to find out about those people, although it irked me to realize I'd had to get my information second-hand.

In the spring Marge began teasing Henry to take her along on one of his selling trips out to Tuolumne Valley; one Saturday I gave in and said she could go. They got back about supper time. Marge ran up to her room without speaking. The marks of crying were on her face.

'Better leave her be,' Henry said. ' I don't know what it's all about, but she'll get over it in her own way.'

After they'd driven a ways, Henry told me, Marge had asked him to go through Wheatville. 'I thought it might help what was troubling her' he said, 'so I did as she asked.' When they got to Wheatville, Henry had to stop for gas 'and,' he said, 'who do you suppose was working there, running the gas pump? That Gates boy!'

'Marge knew that all along, I'll be bound,' I said. 'She's turned very secretive—it must be that boy's influence.'

Henry shook his head. 'I don't believe she knew,' he said. 'I think she hoped to find out where he was, but she was just as surprised to see him as I was.'

Henry told me they hadn't found much to say to each other. Marge had turned shy and the boy seemed embarrassed that she'd found him there. 'I couldn't go to Engineering School after all,' the boy had said, and then Marge had looked angry and turned her head away. They didn't speak again until Henry had started up the engine. The boy asked her how the chipmunk was and she'd smiled and said, 'Fine! And his paw's as good as new.'

Henry said Marge would be all right and not to worry, he didn't think she'd ever see the Gates boy again. For once events proved him right. The following summer Marge went away to camp and made lots of new friends. That fall she started junior high. She fitted in real well, made good grades and got on the basketball team. She got prettier every day and Henry and I were real proud of her.

Marge still set a lot of store by that dratted chipmunk, though. The Purdy boys made fun of her for having such a kid's pet, but she paid them no mind. I wouldn't let her have it in the house, of course, like she'd wanted at first; it lived on the back porch and came when she called to it, like a dog would or a cat. She called it Lorenzo, which I considered about the silliest name for a pet I'd ever heard. He was a funny little animal—tame as could be for Marge and skittish with anyone else.

I forget exactly when it was the creature died; Marge must have had it two, three years by then. One morning she went out back and there it was, laying on its side, stone-cold. Must have just died in its sleep, I guess. Marge took on something surprising, cried all day and wouldn't go to school. In the evening she went up on the hill where the old Hanmer summer house is, and buried it there. Put a little marker on the grave and everything. I told her I'd never known of such childishness from a big girl nearly out of high school, but Henry said to leave her be.

After that I didn't have much more worry with Marge. During the years she was going to State College, lots of changes took place up on the Drive: the Purdys moved away to Idaho and an elderly couple named Randall bought their house. Henry started doing well at the office, business picking up the way it did during the ship-building boom; we built a new porch on the house and I had the garden terraced and replanted.

The Hanmer house, though, never changed. There it stands, empty and uncared for, year after year, a regular eyesore. Only thing that's kept up on the place is the big sign in the front yard: every spring a painter comes and touches up the lettering, *For Sale or Rent*. I have to laugh every time I see the fresh paint. 'Well, there's one thing sure in this world,' I always say to Henry. 'That house will still be empty when we're dead and gone.'

A LETTER-BOX AT EPHESUS

by Arthur Mills Stratton

I USED to wake up when the moon was full remembering that girl standing in the moonlight in the open door of the dark little railroad station in Asia Minor, with the nesting storks outside on the aqueduct rattling their beaks throughout that bright night in Ephesus. Then, wide awake, I'd have to follow her as she ran out of the shadowy waiting room and down the white dry road in search of her husband; and then she began to call for him in Italian—though she was American and her voice was American.

The story about her began in spring on the Bosphorous in 1943.

"Sir, we invite you to go with us to see Ephesus," Christos said and smiled while he waited for me to accept the invitation.

"What's Ephesus?" I asked. Christos and Aris were a couple of my Greek students; they stopped me after class one sunny midday in April.

"It is an ancient Greek city," Christos explained; he seemed to be the spokesman. Both he and Aris were about nineteen or twenty years old.

"Ruins?" I asked. "I've had my fill of ruins. There's nothing deader than a ruined city. I like 'em alive."

"Perhaps there will be some alive people there, though I do not hope so," Aris said, and then he laughed. Christos shut him up very rapidly with a couple of words in Greek. I didn't pay much attention; I was too busy talking.

"I know I ought to enjoy a good ruin," I went on, "but they remind me of death. It's just a lot of broken columns and nicked-up statues—an arm here, a broken back there, and a lot of everlasting stone draperies. I like my people alive, having a good time."

"In Athens before the war," Aris said gravely, "happy cries and laughters heard in the streets at night. Greeks enjoy," he added. Christos spoke better English.

"But, sir," Christos said, "like Ephesus there is no equal," and then he added "except Athens" as an afterthought. "It is full of education. In the Bible there are letters to Ephesus."

"Epistles," I corrected. "Look, ruins are out. I'd like to go with you, but not to see old beaten-up temples. Right now," I said and put on my hat, "I've got to go to lunch."

"But sir!" they said together, and then Christos went on, "wait, sir. Please talk to us some more after the lunch, sir. What else can you do during holidays, sir? It is not amusing to be alone."

"OK," I said and went off to eat. They followed me out of the classroom, and I looked back once to see them talking seriously together. When they gestured with their arms, a black shadow underneath their feet gestured, too. It was a brilliant day. Before I had crossed the campus, they came running and caught up with me.

"We ask you once again, sir," Christos said, out of breath. "We wouldn't bother you, but Mr. Danton has gone off to Africa to be a soldier. He was our good friend, sir. He spoke Greek and he likes Greeks."

"Oh, it isn't that—" I began.

"He was an archaeologist in Greece," Christos said.

"He has a girl in Athens," I said. "She's still there, far as he knows. It happened just before the war."

"Yes," Aris said, "she is my sister. I hope she is not killed, sir." He said this as though he were speaking of an impersonal object, something lovely and fragile and precious, something breakable. "They kill girls, too. He would go with us, sir. He is a soldier." I went into the building.

He is a soldier, I thought. What do they want with me, anyway? Perhaps they blame me for taking this soft job teaching English at Robert College. Hell, I said to myself, trying perhaps to justify my actions, I teach twenty-three hours a week, classes of forty and more, and anyway, my wrist is still no good. I can walk, though, damn near as well as before. This is an important job, too. Turkey is strategic. Turkey is important, and I'm spreading American Culture. That I am. I'm helping Turkey, and Greece, too, because these students will soon be engineers building roads and bridges.

Perhaps I was feeling a little bit guilty. Two days before the boys had questioned me in detail, asking me why I had left the army in Libya—I had joined up with the Fighting French and been wounded—to come to teach in Turkey. Being wounded was nothing unusual at all to them, and no good reason.

And there in my mailbox was a letter from my girl back home. It wasn't very long, and it got straight to the point. In fact she wasn't "my girl" anymore, but the bride of a fine new lieutenant on his way, she wrote, overseas. It appeared she had got tired of waiting, and as I wasn't in the army anymore—. I didn't eat much lunch, and forgot about the Greeks until I met them at the door waiting for me to come out.

"We ask you please to come with us, sir," Christos said. "You will enjoy. It is nice. It is holidays. Where else do you go, sir?" And the two of them looked at me anxiously, waiting for my answer. Where else, indeed, was I to go?

"Sure," I said, "where else, indeed. I might as well. When do we start?"

They laughed out loud before Christos said, "Now, sir. We will go to the police station at Arnavutköy for getting the papers in order to travel."

"Let's go," I said. "I've got a couple of photos. Let's get it over with." I was feeling pretty sad at that time, and I never did like police stations. They still make me feel guilty. But Christos and Aris laughed and talked; they seemed far too cheerful and excited about this trip to the ruins, I thought, but I wasn't paying much attention.

We walked through the cypress trees down to the Bosphorous road. It's a curious Byronic landscape. The hell with it, I said to myself, and looked down at the clear water. Everything's unnatural around here, I thought; everything's some goddamned story. I remember thinking that even the floating garbage had to move along like a sequence of clues in a murder mystery. I wanted to go home. There must have been something in that garbage, for I still remember it—an orange rind, a lettuce leaf, a full-blown rose trailing its stem, a curly white dead poodle, a rag of red damask, a melting newspaper, a single white glove, quite new, but stained brown in spots with small fish nibbling quickly at the bloated curling fingers lying just under the gentle little waves ruffling the surface of the clear water.

I stopped when I saw the dead dog floating round and round in an eddy, and stooped to pick up a handful of stones. I hit the dog with each stone I threw—it made me feel a lot better. The Greeks thought it was fine and kept score. Before long the main current caught the dog and carried it swiftly down into deep water and out of sight.

They say the old harem women used to be sewn in sacks and thrown just off this point into the deep water. I wondered if they screamed much, or if they'd all been garrotted first.

The peeling grey stucco police station had a white carnation and a pink rambling rose growing beside the doorway, and there we met a couple of Greeks who certainly weren't students. It appeared that they were coming with us to Ephesus. They spoke no English, but they did speak Turkish; it was these two who negotiated with the police officers and got all our papers fixed up.

That took a long time, and a great many questions and answers. What the Greeks hadn't counted on was the elegant Turkish officer's speaking French. At one point in the procedure he turned to me and said, "It is correct that you have asked these young men, three Greeks and a Turk, to accompany you to Smyrna and Ephesus to show you the points of interest?"

I caught a glimpse of Christos' face, and he was looking at me with real consternation. He seemed to be begging a favor of me. As a matter of fact, when I lied and said yes, that was the case, the excursion was my own idea, and I had asked these young men all to come along with me for the holiday, I set my foot on a path which damn near killed me, and I guess I got to be a conspirator. In the Middle East a lie carries much more weight than any truth. I hadn't realized I'd got so used to the climate in nine months.

"You told me those two men were Greeks," I said to Christos on the way back. "The police officer tells me one is a Turk. And why did you say *I* had invited you?"

"An American can get—a Greek can not get—"

"Permission to travel?" I asked.

"Yes, sir. In war time."

"I see. And that Greek Turk?"

"He is married to a Turkish girl. It is serious with him, love is. He is from Anatolia, sir, and has a Turkish name, and he speaks Turkish with no accent. He is born in Smyrna before the Greek and Turkish war. When a Greek marries a Turkish girl, he must first give up Christian religion and be circumcised. So, on his papers he is Turkish, with his name, his religion and the country of his birth all Turkish. He is sorry, for at heart he is still Greek."

"I guess he must love his wife," I said. "But why is he coming along?"

"It will be very convenient." Then Christos changed the subject. "Tomorrow at nine we will meet you at the ship." Before I could say a word he and the other three Greeks ran off to catch the waiting trolley. They waved and smiled, and they kept their eyes on me until the tram turned the corner. They needn't have worried. I showed up at the dock in Istanbul next morning.

It was a good boat, German built at Kiel, with all the German knowledge of design and workmanship—and to be sure, of propaganda. They sold it for less than cost price. I stopped to admire the lines—it was a good-looking boat—and then looked around at the crowd. Aris and Christos had seen me, but they didn't wave, or shout, or even change expression. The Greeks as a rule are a noisy bunch. I wondered what was the matter as I walked up the gangplank alone, carrying my bag. I found my cabin, and when I opened the door, there I found them, this time laughing and telling me how glad they were to see me. We three shared the stateroom; I remarked how unusual it was for a teacher to be met so pleasantly out of school. As a matter of fact, they stuck close to me all during the trip. I was never once out of their sight.

I asked for the other two Greeks and was told they had a cabin on the deck below us; those two—in contrast—stayed away from us entirely. They even sat at a different table in the dining saloon. I decided that they did not join us because they spoke no English, but that didn't explain their lack of good manners. They might have nodded good morning, or said it in Turkish. At least I understood that much Turkish. They always spoke Turkish—not Greek.

After we'd put our bags in the stateroom, we went on deck and leaned on the solid German oak rail. We looked out over the magnificent city, and watched the rest of the passengers come aboard.

"I'm through being a teacher for the rest of the trip," I said, and went on to speak my mind about honesty and dishonesty, especially when it concerned dealing with the police. "Don't think I dislike the Greeks. I like 'em all, from Odysseus up to you; but it seems to me that honesty is not one of your great national qualities. I guess it doesn't matter, for you've got a lot of other things, such as guts. But I like honesty."

"Greece is an old country. The earth of Greece is the poorest earth in the world," Christos remarked thoughtfully. "Yet the tree of liberty first grew there. We starve in Greece, though the earth is watered with blood. To feed his family, sometimes a man can not be honest. If he can not feed honesty to his family, he will steal bread, and that is not honest. A starved man dead is not honest nor dishonest, but just dead. We do not want to die! If all Greeks die, where is Greece? We starve in Greece now."

"Damn it, Christos, that doesn't explain why you told the man in the police station I had invited you to Ephesus."

Aris began to speak, but he ran into difficulties with the conditionals of his clauses. "Had he told the truth, sir . . ." he began.

"It would have been? . . ." I supplied.

"Dangerous," Aris said.

"Dangerous? What! Don't give me any of that!"

Aris started to say something, but instead took Christos by the arm and then spoke a word or two in Greek. I looked down at the crowd around the gangplank in the direction the boys were looking. In the East people make no bones about staring at strangers. I wondered who it was Aris had spotted—someone they knew, I judged, though they did not call out or wave at whoever it was.

I saw a dark woman, obviously European, though she wore blazing big diamonds in her ears. She seemed to be staring up at us just the way we were looking down at her, and then I saw a dark man take her elbow and tell her to look away. Then Christos said one sharp word and we all turned our heads to look in the direction of the gate. I saw a dark man, about forty years old. I noticed the very good tweed jacket he was wearing, and wished I had one like it. And then I noticed the blonde girl on his arm, a very attractive young woman who walked as though she were used to being observed. She was wearing a tailored dress she hadn't found in Turkey.

It was a pleasure to watch her. However, I didn't have much chance, for Christos took me by the arm and dragged me off toward the companion-way. "There's an aged American lady on board," he explained seriously. "She is alone. She has a cabin on the deck below ours, and I heard her tell the steward that she was feeling ill. Perhaps you can help her. It is hard to be alone and sick. What is the etiquette in such a case? She is very ugly," he added, "not beautiful. She is afraid. She must be an old maid."

"Well," I said, smiling at his concern, "I might go and offer my services."

"Countrymen in foreign places should help each other," Christos said.

So, while the two Greeks waited, I knocked at her stateroom door, and when she said "come in," I opened the door and stepped across the sill. She *was* unattractive—very thin and pale, lying on the lower berth wrapped in an old woolen dressing gown. She raised herself in alarm when I came in.

Well, it was not a pleasant interview, I closed the door none too gently when I stepped out of her cabin. I was plain angry, and before the Greeks could stop me, I was on my way up the staircase to our own deck. I turned in front of our cabin to explain, for they kept asking me what had happened.

"She indicated that I was drunk and crazed," I said. The boat had pulled away and the slight motion of the engines had made me seem to sway. "She thought I had come in to harm her. Damn the woman! Am I so bad-looking as that? Anyway, I'm not bad-off enough to have to creep up on a skinny old spinster, sick in bed and be-spectacled! Damn me if I'll offer to help any woman again—unless she's young and unattached. Damn chivalry!" I added and burst out laughing.

Some young woman joined me in laughing behind my back. I hadn't noticed that the dark man and the blonde had come along the corridor in back of me while I talked—and blocked the passage. Aris had tried to shut me up, but I brushed him off. Well, the old girl had made me mad.

But as soon as I turned, still laughing, I met a pair of stranger faces, with that expression on them that stops any bid for friendship. Then, in French, she excused herself. I flattened myself against the wall, and the two went past me. She had short curling yellow hair, and she left a fragrance of violets. The man was smoking tobacco that wasn't Turkish. It smelled like an American cigarette to me. I turned to say as much to the Greeks, but found they had opened our cabin door and stepped inside.

"What the hell is all this suspicion?" I asked. "You two are giving out an atmosphere of conspiracy as thick as the Fish Bazaar," I said.

"That man is an Italian," Christos said. "He says he is a reporter. His wife is an American from Boston. That man was a reporter for Italian newspapers, a Fascist, in Boston up to just before the United States came into the war."

"Hm," I began, "what a lot you do know. Well, you can't blame a girl for falling in love. Your Greek friend married a Turkish girl when he fell in love."

"He is not a Turk at heart," Christos said. "This American girl is now a Fascist woman."

"Hell!" I said, "we are in neutral Turkey. We must be civilized."

"I remember in Athens," Aris began. I listened while I washed my hands. "The 'No' to Italy. It was the first day of war between Italy and Greece. It was Sunday, twenty-seventh October 1940, the day before the twenty-eighth October 1940. The streets were full of crowds. From every places happy cries and laughters were listening. It was the last peaceful night that we [illegible] living. The Italians were bringing us to civilization. But we said the 'no' and my father is dead that night of a bomb. I never wished to go away from Athens, but on account of the last events that were the starvation and the possession, I had to come to my cousins in Istanbul. But Italians are still my enemies."

I went up on deck alone and leaned on the rail. A Swiss I'd met a couple of times at Elly's bar in Pera came up to join me—I caught a glimpse of Christos standing just inside the door. The Swiss was a Red Cross representative in Turkey, on his way, he explained—though I did not ask him—to Smyrna to arrange for the reception of some Greek refugees.

"You have a compatriot aboard," he said in English.

"Ah? Who?" I asked, and expected him to name the sick old spinster.

"Signora—," he said, mentioning her name and indicating the young woman who'd laughed at me.

"I thought she walked like an American," I said.

"She is Italian now," the Swiss remarked. "She married him in Boston. He was a journalist."

"She never learned to walk that way along Back Bay," I said. "I hear she renounced America."

"I thought you'd never seen her before?" He asked it as a question.

"Things get around," I replied, and realized I was being mysterious. "Quite a babe."

"Ah, she is very faithful," the Swiss remarked.

"The Swiss!" I said. "You might try whistling. She looks as if she'd understand."

"When one's country is neutral, one gets to know human nature," he said too seriously, and went off to talk to the Italian pair.

"Neutral in French is neuter," I remarked to Christos who came up to me, "which isn't what he is. I'll bet he's a spy."

"Why, sir?"

"Who from Switzerland is not? And what foreigner in Turkey? I think every foreigner in Turkey is a spy," I said and watched the Swiss and the Italian pair laugh and joke together. "Everybody except us. It must be exciting."

During the rest of the trip Aris and Christos spent a lot of time in the cabin. I'd drag them on deck, but only early in the morning when we'd have the place to ourselves. I never once managed to speak to the American girl. She had very pretty feet and several nice pairs of shoes. I'd overhear her talking Italian and French—correctly with a good accent—but that warm voice was just as American as the way she walked. Nope, not on Beacon Street, I thought as I watched her pacing the deck in the good weather with her husband who wasn't bad looking; he had a nice tweed jacket. I only wanted to say a couple of words, to speak of home—but she never gave me the chance. He didn't seem hostile. I watched them and thought about some new clothes. I was pretty shabby-looking.

Only once—in the morning while we were passing close by Mytilene, that shadowy Greek island off the Turkish coast—did she come to rest at any distance from us.

Immediately Christos lowered his voice as he spoke of the Germans and Italians in occupation on the island where Sappho had lived. It is a mountain of an island, and except for olive trees, the rocky land is barren. The fishermen starve, for all the Greek boats have been taken. We could have got there swimming, had we jumped over the rail. What a world!

A school of dolphins began to break through the water and leap through the air. I threw an orange and an apple—and managed to hit one of the things. The blonde cried out "Bravo!" in a most displeasing tone of voice and smiled ironically. Well, I like to throw things. I'm good at it. It helps.

We docked at Smyrna late in the afternoon, and I was glad to see that girl go. The last I'll see of her, I thought, as she left the boat with her husband. I saw her smile when that old spinster scurried past her—running away from me.

We went ashore, got our papers signed, and drove to a hotel. Next morning we took a train for Ephesus, *the* train. Just as the station bell rang—a silver tone that filled the smoky shed—I stuck my head out of the compartment window and saw the other two Greeks boarding the third class car. "Nice bell," I said.

"It is a Greek bell, a church bell," Christos said. "The Turks burned the churches in 1923. There was a massacre."

"Ah, well," I said. "That is past and done for. The Greeks were cruel, too."

Aris said, "Yes, we are cruel. We must be cruel." He used so savage a tone that I looked at him in surprise, and then to change the subject remarked, "I saw that American girl and her husband in a big automobile this morning."

The two of them looked at each other but said nothing. The train started, and I looked out of the window. Soon we got into the fig orchards. It's a curious tree. It lives for centuries, and bears fruit. The trip took all morning, but finally the train stopped at Selcuk, the station—like any other country station despite its name—where you get out for the ruins.

We jumped off and looked around us at the dry village in the blazing noonday light. Beyond the station stood up a huge Byzantine aqueduct, its broken arches striding across the dry valley from the medieval citadel—stored full of explosives, Christos told me—to the surrounding Bulbul Hills. There were a lot of fig trees, smooth-skinned pearly trees with a lot of branches somehow like serpents.

A guide met us, a pleasant middle-aged working man, a Turk, with a fine black moustache and very intelligent black eyes which summed us all up—incorrectly, I hoped. He took us in hand—Aris, Christos, the two silent Greeks, who came to join us like strangers, and I, and we set off walking through the hot dusty town to the police station on the outskirts of Ephesus. There we left our papers with a clerk in one room, and went in to another where we met the Italian and his wife. Their big car was pretty fast, I thought as the sergeant spoke to us all for a minute in Turkish. It appeared that he was warning us to obey his country's laws and not try to lug off any souvenirs. We passed their car—which had a diplomatic license—parked by the police station as we went out the gate.

The Greeks didn't seem to be surprised when they saw the Italians, but I was. We all started off together to see the ruins of Ephesus.

From the start the two Turkish Greeks engaged the guide in conversation. They had handled the business of the papers at the police station. They acted like friendly strangers trying to help us out. They were doing their fellow sight-seers a favor. It occurred to me later on that they had come along for this purpose—to handle the police and to distract the guide.

There's not much use in describing the ruins more than I have to. I have to try to make clear just what happened among the fallen temples. Ephesus was a famous Greek seaport until in Roman times an earthquake laid all the columns flat in a row on the ground, and caused the land to rise and the water to recede from the marble quays. The Aegean shore is now a mile or more away. A swamp has filled the market place. Malaria drove the people to higher ground where they built the citadel on a round hill more than a thousand years ago. That's the one full of explosives.

The temple of Artemis, Diana of the Ephesians, lies between the police station and the ancient city. This is important in the story because the excavation has filled with water like an abandoned quarry. It is deep, and the water is black. We walked on, a straggling group, the Italian couple first, then the guide and the Turkish Greeks, then the three of us, and at once I noticed that Aris and Christos had no interest in the ruins.

It was a brilliant hot sunny day—we'd gone south from Istanbul—and the west wind blew in from Greece across the islands and the Aegean. And the moon was full that night. So it wasn't the climate that produced that ominous atmosphere. I walked along kicking up little clouds of bleached dust, and soon took off my topcoat. I wished I'd left it at the police station. It turned out to be fortunate I had not. I walked along thinking about coincidence and watching the Italian pair. Ephesus was a good mile and more from the police station. We walked along.

Once in the ruins, the Greeks appeared to be playing a game, for I never saw the four of them together. They'd joined forces, like two teams. They kept jumping up on fallen columns, disappearing behind broken walls, running up flights of marble steps in and out of the sunlight and shadow which fell on the edges of the carved stones as sharp as a pen stroke. They looked down from the high rubble walls while we walked the excavated road, and they were continually calling down to me to look here or there. And then they dashed off, high-spirited and noisy. I wished I could join them, but my legs were still too stiff. They were obviously enjoying themselves.

It was hard to keep them straight, and I might have thought there were a dozen or more of them, or only two, for they showed and hid themselves so rapidly. I don't think anyone else saw Aris slip off his jacket and hand it to one of the Greeks who put it on. Then Aris dodged behind a ruined wall and disappeared. I caught one glimpse of him running fast toward the sea. The entire coast of Turkey was military zone at that time, I knew that much, and Aris—a Greek—had no business there. Just as I was about to yell at him, Christos appeared and said quietly, "Sir! don't. Please do not call out. Please, sir, do not look to him."

The Italians were far enough away from us. "Christos," I asked but I spoke in a whisper, "what the hell is going on? Answer me."

"Sir, you must not ask me this question."

"Look," I said, "I had to guarantee the police sergeant that you would behave."

"Do not look to Aris, sir. Look this way; they are watching us. See, sir, this ruined temple." He raised his voice. "The beautiful marble stones." I noticed the Italian pair searching and looking around, trying to count the Greeks. They had not seen Aris, for they were below us in the agora.

"Go down, sir. Talk with them," Christos said.

"I'm damned if I will. They're enemies," I said, "my enemies, too. The Italians—."

"I am Greek, sir, and I beg you, talk with them for only one half of an hour." He took my arm and forced me to step down from the wall of the ruined gymnasium. "I also do not like enemy, sir."

"Where is the guide?" I asked.

"He is talking with the others. They are talking very much and telling stories. I will go to them, and we will go where they can not count us." He ran off and left me to face the Italians.

"It is very beautiful," I said in French, and put myself directly in their path. "One thing strikes me as odd. It is strange that such an ancient civilization should have developed itself in such an unfinished piece of geology. The earth's surface here is obviously unfinished. Even the rocks look raw, and yet the carved marbles speak clearly of magnificent antiquity. But even at this moment we could expect an earthquake to make the ground tremble under our feet."

They made a move to pass by me, and I grabbed the girl by the arm. "See how that row of pillared temples was laid flat all in one shake, one moment, one movement of the soil underneath the foundations. How curiously temporary temporal power is."

The girl shook herself free of my hand and said in French, "Would you mind letting us pass."

"Ah, but," I said, "though I suppose we must technically be enemies, does that mean one must be gross and uncivilized?"

She started to say something, for she flushed and opened her mouth.

"I mean," I cut in quickly, "chance has thrown us all together. Can we not share the pleasures of neutral Turkey and ancient Greece—and Rome. History belongs as much to your country as to mine."

I saw the man take hold of his wife's elbow and restrain her. Then he said, "To be sure, let us admire these beauties together." He said it in French.

"There is a sarcophagus, I believe," I said, "in that temple beyond the amphitheatre and the library. It is Roman. The guide book says so. They cut their coffins from limestone because bodies disintegrate quickly in lime. I have wanted to see it. We can, perhaps—"

"Where are your companions?" she asked.

"Look," I said, and stooped to pick an orchid which was growing at our feet. "For you," I said and offered it to her. "It is a little spider orchid. And here is another. This must be a beetle orchid," I said and giggled, "judging from the looks of it. See, it has a blue metallic shard with a fringe of—a fringe of beetle fur around the edges. Look," I said and began to laugh very hard. I offered it to her, but she dropped it and stepped on it as we walked along.

"Where are—?"

"Here they come, you see," I cut in, and then shouted to Christos, "We are going to the sarcophagus. Let's go together."

"Where are all of those four Greeks?" the girl asked.

"Have you remarked how like monkeys the boys are," I said, "jumping here and there?"

"Except that they are not boys, nor monkeys," she said.

"Ah, madame enjoys watching the young men?" I asked. "Indeed they are young and full of vitality." I looked her husband full in the face. "One ages fast. I, for instance, am getting old. I find the wounds in my legs bothering me when I walk too fast for any distance."

"You were wounded, monsieur?" the Italian asked. I wondered why he didn't hit me.

"Yes. You Italians have made one excellent gun. The Breda machine gun is an excellent weapon."

"But I see only two of the Greeks. Where is that tall blond?" the girl asked.

"Ah, yes, they are Greeks," I said. "You know a great deal about us. You have taken the trouble to count us and discover our nationalities. There is the man you want to see," I said, and pointed to one of the Greeks who was wearing Aris' rust brown jacket. It was only a glimpse. I took the Italian by the arm in what might have been casual friendship, and we walked ahead. I was afraid of his wife, who followed us. The rest of the Greeks ran up and down the hills, perhaps like goats, and I saw Christos' face when he saw Aris returning from the shore. The guide was waiting for us at the turn of the marble road.

It doesn't matter what that damned sarcophagus looked like, though the guide explained it, and doubtless it was handsome with its carved swags and bulls' skulls. The lid fitted tight in the grooves of the box; it is a heavy piece of limestone—the lid, I mean.

When we came out into the sunshine, all four Greeks stood drawn up in a row together, placidly waiting for us. I don't suppose I would have spoken English if the girl hadn't so obviously counted them and then said "Damn!"

"Aren't you ever homesick for Boston, Massachusetts?" I asked suddenly in English, unable not to say it. "Don't you ever miss it?"

"No," she said, and ran her fingers through her thick fair hair. "No. I never have. Why should I miss Boston? What is there to miss in Boston?"

"Home!" I said.

"No, I do not miss it, not at all. Why should I? I have Rome. Italy is my country."

"Are you really Fascists?" I asked.

This time they did not answer, but turned and walked off together. We let them go, though the guide called us all together, and told us to wait until he came back. He had to see the Italians off in their automobile. So we started again to look at the rest of the ruins, and went to the double Byzantine church. I wasn't very interested, so we went back to wait.

"What the hell is this all about?" I asked, and sat down on the broken steps of the amphitheatre which tumbled down the hillside like an orderly cascade. The day was still hot around us, and the amphitheatre held the heat of the setting sun like a bowl. I climbed up the steps to the broken stage and found a cool place in the shadow of a corner. I was worn out.

"What the hell have you Greeks been doing?"

"Sir, that Italian is a spy," Aris said.

"Oh, nuts," I said, and began to laugh. Christos seemed to be alarmed. "What's the matter with you?" I asked. "Don't you see anything funny in the situation?"

"No, sir, it is serious. They know who we are now, and we shall have to move our letter-box."

"His wife," I said. "She can't be a spy."

"She is, sir," Christos said.

"But she didn't offer to go to bed with any of us." The Greeks looked at me curiously. "For the love of Mike," I said, "what's the matter with all of you?"

"They are dangerous, sir," Christos said.

"Well, if she is a spy, she ought to play it by the rules," I said. "If those two are dangerous, they don't act dangerous. How about telling me what I came here for?"

Aris started to explain, but Christos stopped him. "No, sir, it is better that you do not know. If you know all that happens, it will be . . ." he stopped to think a minute. "It might be difficult for you." He stopped to take a breath. "I mean to say it will be a thing you know, something other people will want to know—Italians and Germans—and for you, knowing might be an unsafe thing some night while you are walking along alone by the Bosphorous in the dark."

"You mean somebody might knock me on the head?" I asked incredulously.

"It has already happened before, sir."

"Well, darn me," I said, and burst out laughing. "I'd float along with the dead dogs and the wilted roses in the Bosphorous."

But in fact I didn't feel much like laughing. Who are these boys, anyway? I wondered, and took a good look at them. Aris was tall and blond with curly hair and blue eyes; he might have been anybody's brother or son. Christos in contrast was shorter and very dark with wide-open black eyes. He probably will get heavy, I thought, and need to shave twice a day.

The Turkish Greek had gone back with the guide to keep him company. The rest of us found that we had very little to say, and there we sat in the amphitheatre, three Greeks and one American. I began to get nervous and couldn't sit still. "Let's try out the acoustics of the theatre," I said at last. "Aris, you climb up on the stage and recite something."

He did as I suggested, and I went up to the top seat of the bowl and sat down in a corner of some fallen masonry facing the stage. The sun was setting in back of me, and it wasn't the chill of evening that made me shiver. I was beginning to get frightened, just plain scared, and I didn't want to let the Greeks see how troubled I was. The guide was taking a long time at the police station.

Being arrested in Turkey is no fun; the police do not treat foreigners gently, especially spies caught in war time. It occurred to me that they'd take me for a spy, too. I trembled as if waiting to be shot. My hands shook, so I picked up a stone to hold on to. I never was any good at waiting for something unknown to happen. Even at school at home I'd get nervous before the baseball game, and this was no game.

"What shall I say?" Aris asked, and I jumped. His voice carried clearly across the distance, and he was lighted by the setting sun as if by spotlights.

"Say anything," I said. "Tell us a story." I tossed the smoothed stone from hand to hand. It fit into my palm. It was something to hang on to. It was solid comfort.

Christos and the other Greek, whose name I never did know, sat down front in the first row way below me, and they didn't seem to hear my voice when it shook. They had their backs to me, and Aris couldn't see how nervous I was because the level sun's rays dazzled him. I felt unsafe and alone, and I wanted a drink badly. Why didn't that guide come back?

"I shall tell you what happened to me in Greece," Aris began. "It took place on the Albanian mountains during the first days of this great war. I shall tell you this story the way it happened to me. It was a cold day of December, 1941, when I was ordered to recognize the opposite mountains with few men of my station. I began to walk slowly on the snow. I went on till a soldier said to me that Italian soldiers came along the road. I ordered my men to hide themselves behind the rocks, and when the Italians came nearer, we began to kill them."

He seemed very young to kill a man, I thought, and turned my head to look across the road back toward the sea, and that's why I caught sight of the Italian. He was coming toward us, but why did he move so stealthily? and why did he drop to the ground when he came inside the range of Aris' voice? I must really have guessed why when I saw the Italian begin to crawl along the ridge toward us on his belly. I curled my fingers tight around my stone, and held myself together.

"At first," Aris was saying, "the Italian soldiers were surprised, but after some seconds they understood we were Greeks. They fell down on the ground and began to fight against us. After some minutes, I found myself behind a big tree, and an Italian officer behind an opposite tree."

I listened to Aris, and I watched the Italian. Where is his wife? I thought. He does not see me, and where is she? I edged farther back into the shadow that protected me where I sat. It didn't occur to me to yell, to shout, to warn the Greeks. I sat still and watched that Italian crawl along among the rocks. Then he came near enough and I saw he held a revolver in his hand.

"We began to shoot each other," Aris went on, and he was far off in

Greece, away from here. "After some minutes, seeing that I had only two bullets left, I had an idea. I put my bullets in the second and third place of my gun, leaving empty the first place of the bullet, so when I pulled—sir?" he broke off with a question in his tone of voice. "Sir, what is called the little thing which shoots the gun?" He made a motion as if he held a gun, and curled his trigger finger.

"Trigger," Christos said, proudly, before I was forced to speak. I wondered where he'd learned the word. I had my eye on the Italian. He can't see me, he doesn't see me, I repeated to myself over and over. I didn't dare move or make a sound, and I couldn't seem to make up my mind. What was I supposed to do? The Italian's eyes were fixed on Aris. I didn't want him to see me.

"So when I pulled the trigger," I heard Aris say, "the Italian—the Italian heard the voice of the trigger, and thinking that my revolver was empty, he came out of his hiding place behind the thick tree to kill me. But as I said before, the second bullet was in his place, and seeing him near me, I killed him. He was a beautiful tall man with blond hair and about twenty-five years old. Perhaps his mother, his sister, his wife will forget him, but I, his killer, I shall never forget him."

I found that I was sweating. The round piece of marble in my hand was a defaced head broken from some high relief, I thought. My mind suddenly began to work. That stone was about the size of a baseball. I hung on to it, tight, and sat still in the shadow of my corner. I sat so still that a small green lizard scuttled up close to me, and then stopped, and I could see his throat inflate and empty with his breath.

Aris stopped speaking, but stood there, a sure target on the high stage in the sunlight, a big young man. I kept my eyes fixed on the Italian, but lost sight of him for a moment as he crawled behind a broken pedestal; and when I did not have him to look at, my eyes fell on a fat mottled brown snake sliding along fast in my direction on the warm marble step in the sunshine; and as it came closer suddenly I saw it carried a mole in its jaws, a blind mole, not yet dead but alive, kicking the air with its feet like hands in convulsions, and I could not stand that; so when the Italian crawled into sight, I jumped up, and threw the round stone head I held in my hand like a baseball. It hit the Italian right where I had aimed at him immobile on his knees, his right hand and arm raised as if he had been a dog offering to shake hands, but in fact he was a man aiming at Aris with an automatic.

My stone hit him; I heard it thud and thought of a pumpkin, and heard the stone roll down the steps of the amphitheatre, gathering speed. But I wasn't paying attention; I was after that snake to kill it, and I jumped down the steps three at a time, crying out, "Where did it go? Where is it? It had a mole alive in its jaws."

The Greeks paid no attention to me, but ran up the stone benches to where the Italian lay on his face.

"It's gone," I said. "I was looking for a snake. It had a mole in its mouth."

Christos reached the Italian first. "He is not dead," he said, and turned the man over. I looked up at them. The sun had gone down behind the hills.

"You have hit him here," Aris said and pointed to his own temple," and his head is broke."

"Broken," I corrected. "Then he will die." I began to climb up the steps.

"Yes," Christos said. "Yes, he will die. But when?"

"In hours," Aris said.

"He's dead, but he won't stop breathing," I said.

"We can not wait," Aris remarked. He bent over and took hold of the Italian, who was not a heavy man, and shook the life out of him. Aris was tall for a Greek, tall and big, but after a moment he was panting. I lay down on a bench and began to shudder as though I were chilled through. I felt the heat of the sun-warmed marble through my clothes, but I still shivered.

"Sir," Christos said thoughtfully, "you should not have done this thing. It is bad. It is unlucky."

"It sure is," I said and would have liked to have laughed, but didn't dare begin. "I should not have killed him. But where would Aris be now if I had not?"

"He might have missed Aris," Christos said. He turned to look, and then pointed down the road toward the police station. "Here comes the guide with our friend."

Aris called to the third Greek, in Greek, and seemed to give some orders, for the man got up and hurried off to meet the guide.

"What did you say? Where is he going?" I shouted irritably, for I can't understand a word of Greek.

"Please be quiet, sir," Christos said. "He has gone to tell the guide that we are over the hill at the cave of the Seven Sleepers. Then the guide will go with him over there to find us."

"Well, we're here! What is the point of that?"

"This dead Italian man is here, too, sir."

"I do know that," I said. "We must explain how I happened to kill him."

"Oh, no, sir, we must not. We must hide him. Otherwise the police will keep us for a week, or a month, even more, and the newspapers will all write about this happening." There was no hesitation in Christos' mind or voice.

"And why not?" I asked.

"Because we must hurry back to Istanbul, sir. It is very important." Then Aris and Christos began to talk in Greek, quietly. We were crouched down in the shadow of the broken walls, all waiting for the guide and the two others to pass us and go beyond us out of sight.

"What are you saying?" I asked angrily. "Speak English, can't you!"

"Excuse us, sir," Aris gravely replied. "We ask ourselves what to do with this dead man."

"Bury him!" I said bitterly. "Put him in his grave. Put him in a stone sarcophagus. Damn these ruins! Why the hell did I have to come here, anyway."

"You are right, sir," Christos said and laughed. "We will put him in that sarcophagus in the temple. He will rot quickly, and no one will ever look for him there."

As soon as the guide and those two other Greeks had crossed the line of the hill, we three carried the body down the steps of the deserted theatre, and ran along the marble street to the temple near the ruined library. This temple was cut out of the side of a hill, and so it had part of its roof, and gave us some shelter. While Christos and I lifted off the heavy stone lid, Aris began to strip the body.

"Hurry, sir, but be careful," Christos whispered.

"This man has all his papers," Aris said, examining the Italian's bill fold. "It says here that he has left Ephesus to go to Smyrna by automobile. That means the police think he has gone away. He drove his car away, but stopped, I think, and came back hiding so the police have not seen him. His wife is perhaps waiting for him in the car down the road. Perhaps he had trouble with a tire. At least, they perhaps are pretending that. She is waiting. We must hurry."

"Why?" I asked, "Why? Why?" I pulled off the man's shoes.

"We will bury those shoes in the swamp," Aris said. "He came back to shoot us if he must—to get. . . . Sir, I have some news from Greece. It is about the Germans and the Italians."

"What? What kind?"

"Do not ask to us, sir." Christos took the bill fold from Aris. "Here, sir, you will carry the man's papers. It is a diplomatic passport."

I took it, but wanted to drop it. "It's full of money. I don't want it!"

"Sir, you are foolish," Aris said sharply. I put the thing in my pocket. By this time we had all the clothes off the body, and I held that tweed jacket in my hands. It was Harris tweed, well cut.

"You should not have killed him, sir," Christos said.

"No," I said.

"Yes, sir. It is too hard hiding a body."

"Oh," I said.

"In life he could not have harmed us. When a spy is known, it is harmless. It is finished. It would have been better to leave him alive."

"Anyhow," Aris said looking at the body, "it is obvious he is a Christian—not a Turk or a Jew, I mean, sir. If the Turkish police find him before he is only bones, they will see he is a Christian, and they will not make much fuss about a Christian dead man."

We lifted the body and dumped it into the deep limestone box. Then, while Aris and Christos scooped up handfuls of dry loose dust and threw it over the body, I got out my penknife as I was told, and cut off the labels on his clothes. The tweed jacket and flannel trousers were made by a tailor in Boston, Massachusetts. The heavy silk shirt came from Milano. The underwear from Paris. I cut off the laundry marks, and any button with a stamp on it. He wore a pair of monogrammed gold cuff-links, which I threw away— they were valuable—and then had to go and find again. I put them in my pants pocket.

Then I folded the clothes and put them inside my folded topcoat. After that, I began to gather the dry dirt to throw over his body. We had to hurry. I filled my hat with dust like a bucket. Then we fitted the lid back into its tight grooves—the Romans did good work in those days—and with the man's socks, I wiped the surface of the limestone clean, and smoothed over the traces of our hands and feet in the dirt. We were sweating when we left the place. We walked down to the ruined gymnasium to await the guide.

"It's hot," I said, and wiped my face with my handkerchief. "I wonder what his wife is doing? I'm very hungry." I was too tired to be afraid any more. "I wish I had a good meal."

"The best thing that ever happened to me was a good dinner," Aris said. "You must not laugh at me."

I listened to him idly, for I was exhausted, and when Christos said, "Tell him," I said, "Yes, do. Tell me about it." But my mind was not listening. I looked around, expecting to see that girl.

"Ten months ago I had been in Athens, and of course, and I also, I was suffering of the starvation. At the summer the starvation was not so great, but as the winter was coming and the starvation grew larger."

His voice changed, and I thought his emotion was spoiling all the good English I'd taught him. I looked down the road toward the town. It was dusk. I remembered that eleven of Aris' family had died of starvation and tuberculosis and guns.

"At the morning everybody could see at the corners of the streets wretched dead bodies lying on the ground with their mouths and eyes opened and waiting for the cart. It was not fear on their faces when they felt the death coming. The only thing was a sorrow, because the dead men must be absence at the feast of victory."

And as I watched the white road running through the still green fields at dusk, I saw her, that American girl, walking alone with the freedom you only find in America. It was a foreign thing in that Anatolian landscape littered with fluted honey-colored columns. She wore a rosy sweater and a skirt of some flexible stuff I couldn't recognize. She stepped along freely, coming this way in a skirt the color of dust.

"Here she comes," I said.

"We will wait for her here," Christos said. They didn't turn to look. They sat with their backs to her. It was the time of day that colors are purest under the suffused sky. In the quiet we heard the doves' wings as they flew above us to their nests in the fig trees. I pulled a blood red anemone up by the roots and looked into its cup. The center of the flower is black.

"In Athens from every place happy cries and laughters heard when I was little. Every one could see the happiness pictured on the faces of the people, the stores were full of things, and every one could buy anything that he wished."

I watched the girl, the way she walked. She seemed to have more light on her than was left in the day. She walked along with good long strides.

"I never forget the New Year under the possession," Aris went on. "The weather was very bad. The wind was blowing and the white snow mixing with the blackness gave a more horrible sight to the night. The few people hastened to come to their houses. Not because they wished to celebrate. No. They knew well that at their houses they will find nothing to eat, not bread. Some oranges, perhaps. They will eat oranges and then altogether will pray to God to set them free from that cruel animals."

He must have heard her footsteps. Christos did, and got to his feet. He said nothing to Aris, who was back in Athens, remembering. The girl stopped, and waited until she could interrupt him. She counted us, and looked around, searching for the others. Perhaps she was undecided.

"At that time the soldiers of possession were eating and drinking. They drank and ate not wine and meat. They drank the blood and ate the body of our people. But never mind. The day is coming—" He looked around, saw the girl, and jumped to his feet.

I couldn't look at her. I fixed on her dust-colored skirt, and couldn't bring myself to meet her eyes. I thought I'd not be able not to look back at the temple which housed the sarcophagus.

"I beg your pardon," she said, "but haven't you seen my husband?"

"No, lady," Christos said. "Who is he?"

"You know my husband," she said. "He told me he would be right back. He said he'd lost something, a gold cuff-link. It was an old one from his family."

"What is your skirt made of?" I asked. The words were out of my mouth before I could stop them, for I had those cuff-links in my pants pocket.

"Antelope skin," she said, and turned away in disgust. "I wonder where he is? There are snakes in these ruins."

She doesn't really know, she doesn't know, I thought. She hasn't anything to do with it.

"I can help you search for him," Aris said gravely, and he smiled at her.

"Thank you, no. No thank you," she said. She walked off and we watched her go. I suddenly wanted to shout out and tell her where to look. The boys—as if they read my mind—each took me by the arm. I must have looked tired as I felt, and as miserable.

"Sir, do not believe that she is innocent," Christos said. "Do not think she does not take part in this thing."

"She's pretty," I said. "She is full of courage. It is a dirty waste."

The Greeks looked at me for a moment, as if I'd introduced them to a very new idea.

"But most people are brave," Christos said.

"That is not so," I said and thought of myself.

Then we heard her scream and saw her come running back towards us, evidently for some reason we didn't guess. She blurted out that she had seen a wet rat come out of a hole under the Egyptian temple. Then, having shown that she was afraid, she opened her bag and pulled out an automatic as big as my palm. Aris and Christos jumped and caught her wrists, and forced the little thing out of her grip. For a second she looked beaten, but it was only for a second. She turned about on her heel like a soldier, or a girl in the line, with so abrupt a movement that her skirt belled out, and she walked back toward the rat. She'd not have bungled, if it hadn't been for that rat.

The guide came along with the two other Greeks; he looked at us shrewdly, but didn't say anything.

"I am angry," Aris remarked.

"Angry?" I asked in surprise.

"I want to eat some food."

"Oh, hungry!" I said and laughed much too loud. The guide smiled politely.

On the way back we stopped at the pool of Diana of the Ephesians, and we made a little comedy in which I slipped on a slimy stone and had to drop my coat into the water when I grabbed Aris' arm to steady myself. The topcoat floated, but the other clothes sank. I'd filled the pockets with stones. The night had fallen. It wasn't hard to do. The guide fished out my coat, and we wrung the water out of it. The police sergeant laughed, too, when he found out why my coat was so wet.

Then we all went off with the guide and the police sergeant to drink a bottle of raki and eat a meal. We laughed and joked, and waited for the only train, which was late. When they left, the Guide and police sergeant smiled and shook hands with us politely. I'd given the guide a good tip—not too much; the police sergeant refused. There was a rule against it.

The moon rose, and the night grew cool. We walked to the empty little station, and waited. Outside, a freshly-killed wild boar hung head down dripping from the branch of an oak tree.

A lot of storks had built their nests of sticks on the ruined aqueduct, and as the moon rose and filled the night, the storks awoke and clapped their beaks together with a loud clacking. Those birds woke up the night; even the dogs began to bark.

"I know about storks now," I said. "I know how it is storks bring the babies."

The girl walked in, almost she came running into the station where we sat waiting.

"Where's my husband?"

"Madame," I said in French, "I—"

"Where is he?"

"Didn't you find him?" I asked in English, and hurried on to say, "I thought you'd driven off in your automobile. Did you have a breakdown?" I guess my voice choked when I said, "I don't know anything about him. I don't!"

"We don't know anything about your husband, sir," Aris said.

"Not 'sir,' Aris," I corrected.

"Lady, we have not seen your husband. We are sorry." The four Greeks stood in a circle around her in the dark room.

Somehow I hoped she would begin to cry, but she did not. "Go home to Boston!" I said. "Please go home."

The train pulled in. She ran out of the station into the moonlight, and that's the last I saw of her. We got on the train.

And that is the end of the story. Nothing else happened. Nothing happened on the train, nor in Smyrna, nor on the boat, nor back in Istanbul. The end is the damnedest part of it: nothing happened! And that frightened me worse than any other part of it. I couldn't find out anything at all. I don't know who protected me. I never read a word about the Italian, or heard anything said. I killed a man, and nothing happened.

Whenever I had to walk along the Bosphorous alone at night, I'd have to hold on tight to myself to keep from running, to keep from crying out, but nothing ever came out of the shadows, and the night was normally still.

I left Turkey in June and went back into the army, our own army. There death was something else, and when a man was killed, he didn't vanish the way a cloud is drunk up in a hot sky. I never will know what happened to his wife.

WHERE'S JUSTICE?

by Wright Morris

The river should be there, Cape thought, and walked to look out the window, but a blowing curtain of sleet blocked the view. At the edge of the yard four black boys sat under the lean-to on the wood shed and looked at the hoes they had left lying in the rain.

"There's a fine view," Hickman said, "from here across the river. They say that Audubon sat up here, somewhere, and painted it. We're on a bluff here facing the river you know."

"Well—" said Cape, and turned back to the room. Perhaps because of the glass in the windows, which had the bluish cast of water, the light in the room was like that in a cake of clear ice. Cape rubbed his hands together and faced the fireplace, expectantly.

"You're not *cold?"* Hickman said.

"Just a little damp," said Cape.

"You people!" said Hickman, and shook his head as he marvelled. "We always expect you to complain about the heat, we arrange a cool day, iced drinks, and then you are cold."

"You arranged *ice* drinks?" said Cape.

"Figuratively—" Hickman said, and turned from Cape to walk to the door. Putting his head into the hall he called, "Uncle Blue—Uncle BLUE!" in a voice so loud that Cape thought it a bit strained. Then he returned to the fireplace and swept the ashes into the corner, tore up the sheet of paper he found at the bottom of the kindling box. It was not enough, he looked around for more. When he turned he saw Cape browsing in a book he had picked up from the table. "Plato—" Hickman said, "but I don't suppose you read the Greek?"

"No," said Cape, "No, I don't." Looking up at Hickman he said, "I once made a stab at it—how does it go—en ar-chay an o logos, kai o logos an . . . something, something."

"Something like that," Hickman said.

"I don't see how you find the time," Cape said.

"It's all I do read," Hickman said, "otherwise I'd forget it—like I've forgotten my Latin. I majored, you know, in Latin and Greek."

"No, I didn't know," said Cape.

"Went into Law later," Hickman said, and stood up to return to the door. No one was there, nor standing in the hall, but Hickman remained as if he were eavesdropping. Then he seemed to hear something for he said, "You there Uncle Blue?"

"Ah-ahhhh—" said Uncle Blue.

"Where's Justice?" said Hickman.

"He aroun—" said Uncle Blue.

"We'd like a fire in here, Uncle Blue," said Hickman, "we'd like a fire in here, would you bring in some wood?"

"AH-ahhhh," said Uncle Blue, and that was all. Hickman closed the door, quietly, and came back to the fireplace.

"We could have a drink," he said. "Suppose we have a drink?"

"That would be fine," said Cape.

"It's good to see a white man," Hickman said, and crossed the room to a small door in the wall. He unlocked it with a key he removed from his vest. The decanter he brought out was nearly empty, but Cape was distracted by the glasses—or goblets, silver goblets, as they proved to be. Coin silver in color, with the satin finish of an old dime, the shallow basins were like flowers on graceful hollow stems.

"Very, very nice," said Cape.

"One hundred and eighty-eight—no nine," said Hickman. "One hundred and eighty-nine years old this month." As he poured out the liquor he said, "I suppose you wonder about the lock?"

"Not at all," said Cape.

"These people—" he said, and gestured toward the window with his hand, looking at what he seemed to see there with amusement and sadness. "These people," he repeated, then turning back to the goblet, "We once had a dozen—twelve of them." He held it aloft for a toast and as it chimed against Cape's he added—"Twelve of them—now I have these two."

"I suppose they're worth quite a bit," Cape said.

"Worth—?" said Hickman. "Oh—oh, they don't steal them. These are my people—these are not the kind you get in the North."

"I suppose not," Cape said.

"These are my people," Hickman repeated, and as he raised his goblet he peered over the rim of it at Cape. "You people amuse us," he said, "—if you don't mind my speaking frankly?"

"Not at all," said Cape, and waited for Hickman to go on. But he seemed to have finished for he turned again toward the window. "No, not at all," Cape repeated, "if we're ever going to have an understanding it's—"

"Where do *you* think they feel at home?" Hickman said.

"Damned if I know," said Cape.

"If you'd go back and read your Plato," said Hickman, "for more than Jowett's prose style, you people wouldn't make such costly mistakes. Costly and irreparable mistakes. You've got things in a mess we may never straighten out."

Cape was about to reply when he noticed that Hickman, rather than looking at him was looking beyond him at the door. He turned, and saw a very ancient Negro with white hair and milky blue eyes, smiling at them as if in wonder at what he saw. His arms were extended, as if in greeting, and for a moment Cape did not see that a small piece of wet wood was crossed on them. It was about as long and as thick as a roll of salami.

"Thank you, Uncle Blue," Hickman said, "but one piece of wood is hardly enough—is it now—to make a fire?"

"Ah-AHhhh—" said Uncle Blue, and wagged his head.

"Uncle Blue," said Hickman, "you get us some paper—you ask Melanie to give you some paper." Uncle Blue remained to look at them admiringly. When Hickman took the piece of wood and placed it in the fireplace, Uncle Blue shook his head as if in awe at what he had seen.

"A wondah—" he said, "he really a wondah," and rolled his eyes.

Turning to Cape, Hickman said, "Will you pardon me for a moment?" Then he left the room before Cape could reply. Uncle Blue watched him hurry away with the admiration of a father seeing his child walk for the first time. When Hickman had gone he turned to look at Cape. The old man looked blind, stone blind with cataracts, but somewhere, somehow, he seemed to see something. It gave him great pleasure and he continued to smile.

"A nasty day," said Cape.

"AHhhhhh—" said Uncle Blue, and continued to stare, unblinking, at whatever he saw. Cape returned to the window and peered out at the rain, and the black boys still contemplating their hoes. One of them was now napping, his hat tipped over his eyes. As Cape stared, from behind the shed Hickman suddenly appeared, half running, with three large logs in his arms. He crossed the yard toward the house, and as the sleet was now heavy the top of his bald head looked cold and slippery. When Cape turned from the window Uncle Blue was gone. The door was closed, but for a moment he had the feeling, the conviction, that the old man was somewhere in the room. He did not move from where he stood until Hickman pushed on the door and backed in with the logs. Cape waited, and there in the door, quietly, appeared the old man, a single sheet of the morning paper in his hand. He said nothing, but stood watching Hickman with such great expectation that Cape stepped forward to look at him too. He was doing nothing but placing the logs, rather poorly at that.

Turning to Uncle Blue, Hickman said, "Thank you very much, Uncle Blue, and now would you tell Justice to bring us some more wood?"

"Look how it burn!" said Uncle Blue, "He really a wondah—look how it burn!" As the paper took fire Hickman fanned it with his hand, then he put his face to the floor to blow on it. "Look how it burn!" said Uncle Blue. "Look how it burn!"

Cape stood with him, watching it burn, until he saw that it was bound to go out. When he turned away he saw the old man was gone again. "Tell him we'll need some more paper," Hickman said.

"Paper—" said Cape, leaning into the hallway. "Could we have some more paper please?"

"Ah-Ahhhhh—" said Uncle Blue. The sound was there in the hallway when Cape leaned out to see where it was, but it was impossible to tell from where it had come. Uncle Blue was not there, but his voice continued to ascend the stairway, pausing on the landing for Cape to wonder at it.

"You better close that door—there's a draft," said Hickman, and pushed it shut.

The Greek Republic—Hickman said, while they stood about waiting for some more paper—was, as he knew better than most people, not a paradise. But it offered a plan for the governing of men. Taking men as they were, not some nonsense about how they should be, Plato had tried to civilize them. The private ideal of the South had been Plato's ideal, a neo-Greek Republic, a culture with values—aristocratic values, if you like. And left to themselves they would have done it—as a matter of fact some of them, quite a few of them, had done it in spite of everything. Here on these bluffs his father had made—on these bluffs overlooking the river—a commonwealth Plato would have admired. But he, Carter Hickman, had made the mistake of letting the sentiments of irrelevant people—Cape's people—obscure the reality. A Harvard liberal, he had made the mistake of confusing reforms—like the New Deal—with the true problems of the governing of men. The governing of men remained the same. It was either Plato's Republic, with competent representation, or it was mob rule with Hitler, Mussolini, or such riff-raff.

"And Roosevelt—?" said Cape.

Hickman left the window and crossed to his desk where he opened the top drawer, removed a large framed photograph. He blew on the glass, and then wiped it with his sleeve. Returning to Cape he held the picture so that the light, what light there still was, fell on the face of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. It was inscribed—

To my good friend
Carter Hickman
Sincerely,
Franklin D. Roosevelt

"I just wrote him," Hickman said, "that I cannot support him for reëlection. I told him that in my considered opinion he is wrong." He walked back across the room and placed the photograph in the drawer—then he removed it, placed it face down. "You people—" he said, and looked at Cape with the same expression that Cape had seen on his face when he looked at Uncle Blue. "The year I supported him—" he went on, "I gave every boy on the place fifty dollars in cash and a one-way ticket to Memphis. The youngest boy was back here in three weeks. The second and third boys were back here in three months, and the fourth boy was here in time for dinner on Christmas day." Here Hickman stopped—but he looked at Cape in such a manner that Cape knew what he was meant to say.

"And the last boy?" he said.

"He came back just a month ago," said Hickman. "His name is Justice, and he came back in time for spring."

"His name is *Justice?"* said Cape.

"Justice returned—" said Hickman, speaking to himself, "March twenty-third, nineteen hundred and forty." Then, in answer to Cape he said, "The first slave that my grandfather freed was named Justice. The first boy in every new litter inherits the name."

"It's quite a name," said Cape.

"After four years," said Hickman, again speaking to himself, "Justice returned last month." This seemed to remind him of something for he crossed to the door, opened it slightly, and stood listening. Faintly, but unmistakably, Cape could hear a high wild laugh. But it had a muffled, bottled sound until a door suddenly opened and it spilled into the hallway like a flood. Closing the door Hickman said, "That's him now—that's Justice," and came back to stare at the logs. "We still need some paper," he said, "don't we?"

"Don't bother," Cape said.

"No, you're cold," Hickman said, "I don't want you to be getting cold," and he returned to the door, opened it. After a moment, in a voice so low that Cape could hardly hear it, he said, "Uncle Blue—where's Justice?"

"He aroun—" said Uncle Blue, who seemed to have been just waiting there.

"Uncle Blue—" Hickman said, "you tell him we need some more paper. You tell him to ask Melanie to give him some."

"Ah-ahhh—" said Uncle Blue, and Hickman closed the door. He came back to the fireplace and said, "If I tell Uncle Blue he seldom remembers, but if I tell him to tell Justice—sometimes he does." Cape laughed, but Hickman just stood looking at him. "While you're here," he said, leaving the fireplace, "there's something I'd like to show you—something that might give you some idea what you people have done." He returned to the door, bolted it, then came back and picked up the decanter. Holding it to the light he said, "Well, it looks like about one swallow." Cape held out his goblet and Hickman divided the swallow equally.

At the back of the study was a wooden chest covered with a faded Paisley shawl, which Hickman removed, and folded carefully. "My mother's chest," he said, neither to Cape nor to himself, but abstractly. "Things she wore as a girl at the steamboat landing in Natchez." Raising his voice he said, "You'll have to remember that Natchez was quite a place in its day—something like New Orleans in the eighteen thirties, Audubon's time. These were things my mother wore every day, not just on Sunday—quite a bit different than what you are used to, I suppose."

"Yes—quite," said Cape, then dropped back a step from the draft of perfume and mothballs that rose like a cloud. Lying on the top was a dress of wine-colored velvet, like a ruby Port, at which they stared until Cape said—

"Beautiful!"

"Yes—" said Hickman, "but it isn't beauty that I want to show you." He raised the top dress carefully and on the velvet garment beneath, as if on display, were the ten remaining silver goblets. Cape stared at them for a moment before something in their appearance, the tip of the bowls, really troubled him. Then he saw that each goblet had been twisted on its stem, some more than others, but each given a turn so that it would not stand. None had been twisted off, nor otherwise damaged, just given a turn that tipped the shallow bowl so that it would spill.

"For God's sake!" he said.

Hickman smiled, happily, and held one of the goblets to the light. To twist it just so far, and no further, demanded both strength and skill. "How's that?" said Hickman, and clucked his tongue admiringly.

"Well, I'll be damned," said Cape. "How in God's name did you ever—"

"Melanie!" Hickman said, with decision, "Melanie—while she was wiping them."

"Wiping—?" said Cape.

"While she was wiping them. Every time she wiped them one more would return like this."

"I don't believe it," said Cape.

"I went out to her," Hickman said, as if he had expected such an answer, "I went out to her right after she had *wiped* the second one. I took a goblet in my hands, like this, and showed her how to wipe it. 'Like this, Mistah Hickman?' she said. 'Yes, Melanie, like that,' I said. And then right before my eyes she twisted it."

Cape just stared at him.

"Melanie—" said Hickman, "is a very powerful woman. She is young and very powerful," he repeated. Cape still said nothing so Hickman said, "So you can see why it is that I keep the last two under lock and key." He took the twisted goblet from Cape's hand and returned it to the chest. He covered them all again with the velvet, closed the chest, locked it, and replaced the Paisley shawl. "You have to see it to believe it," he said, "so I thought I'd better show you."

"It's quite a sight," said Cape.

"What you might not see," said Hickman, "is what it means." As it was nearly dark Hickman pulled the drapes and turned on the study lamp on his desk. "What it means," he said, "you know what it means?"

Cape started to speak, then stopped when he heard a knock at the door. Hickman opened it on the figure of a young Negro, about six feet tall, who held in one hand a small hat, and in the other a piece of wet wood. It was a little bit smaller, and wetter, than the piece Uncle Blue had brought in.

"Uncle Blue say you call for some wood," he said.

"Thank you, Justice," said Hickman, "but right now we need paper. We can use the wood but we need the paper first."

"No more wood?" said Justice.

"Not—" said Hickman, "till we get a little paper. Justice, you ask Melanie to give you some from her pile." Justice seemed to consider this, then he slowly shook his head. He was a giant above the waist, but his legs were so dwarfed he seemed to hover, they appeared little more than a ground connection he kept with the floor.

"If you want any wood," he said, "you call Justice. If you want any paper—" he shook his head. "Mistah Hickman," he said, "you know Melanie—"

"Yes," said Hickman, "yes, I know—but if you tell her it's for me—"

"If you want any wood you call Justice," Justice said.

"Thank you, Justice," Hickman said, "I'll call you when I want any."

"You sure you enough?"

"Yes, Justice—" said Hickman, but Justice remained at the door. He stood shaking his head as if he couldn't believe it.

"You sure now—?" he said.

"Yes," said Hickman. Justice remained there, however, until Hickman closed the door—then Hickman opened it again immediately. Justice had not moved, he still held his hat and the wet piece of wood. "Yes—?" said Hickman.

"Melanie want to know how many to set for?" Justice said.

Hickman half turned to Cape, then he turned back and leaned on the door, "Tell her just the same, just the same as usual," he said.

"No more then?"

"No, no more," said Hickman. He closed the door but he remained there, as if thinking, until he heard Justice walk on the stairs. "I would like to ask you to stay," he said, "but Melanie—"

"I've got to get on," Cape said, and took out his watch, looked at it. "I've got to get on to Memphis tonight."

Nearly gay, Hickman said, "Well, I hope you like it better than my boys did."

"They seem to like it here, all right," Cape said.

"Oh yes," said Hickman, "they like it here," and offered Cape his coat. Over Cape's shoulder, in a quiet voice, he said, "My grandfather freed them, my father kept them, and now—" as he didn't finish, Cape turned and looked at him. He held his goblet, gripped in both hands, as he had prescribed for Melanie, and as Melanie had done he now twisted it. It required all of his strength, a little more than he could control, for at the moment that he should have stopped, relaxed, the stem snapped. Holding a piece in each hand he said, "When the worm turns—it snaps!" then he placed each piece, with his hands, in the pocket of his coat. At the door he said, "I want you to know how much I've enjoyed this, would like to have you for supper—but I'm afraid that Melanie. . . ."

"I know, I know—" Cape said, and walked into the hall. They went down the hall toward the door but before they reached it Melanie, her skirts sweeping the floor, moved out in front of them from a room on the side. She was the soft, hushed color of soot, and in her long skirts she did not appear to walk so much as to glide. Like a barge with the current that Cape could feel sweeping him toward the door. She went before them, blocking the passage, until she reached the door, which she opened and in the same gesture disappeared. Cape and Hickman went out on the porch where Cape stopped to push up his collar and look between the columns to where the rain flushed down the drive. When he turned to say goodbye, Hickman was already moving away.

"Melanie is holding the door for me," he said, and so she was, it stood wide open until Hickman hurried into the hall. Then it drifted shut, and as the lights came on Cape saw the shadow of her figure swell in the hall, then move up the walls to flood the house.

THE NEVER NEVER BIRD

by Nancy Wilson Ross

SHE had been quarreling with the much younger man who was sitting with her in the fading light of her charming drawing room. Quarreling was perhaps too strong a word to use in connection with someone who prided herself on her invariable composure. It was his voice that had risen, not hers. The cause of the quarrel was trivial—a disagreement about the quality of a Chinese ceramic at least seven hundred years old.

It was not really the Ting bowl over which he had become rude, she thought now, with the analytical detachment on which she also prided herself. His tension and subtle bad manners had been growing for some time; born of the difference in their ages, and the fact that he was weary of being so much with her and did not know how gracefully to extricate himself, since he was in her debt for many large and small generosities.

"I am fifty-four years old."

Without seeing it she stared down at the coiled gold serpent, holding a small but perfect ruby in its mouth as it twined around the little finger of her left hand. "But I neither look nor feel my age. I have worked hard for many years—as any woman must who wishes success in a world that still belongs to men—but I have taken excellent care of my face and body. And fifty-four is not old anyway. The blood is cooler then, the mind clearer, than at thirty-four or forty-four. It is a happier state of being. Yet I cannot say I feel happy—though I do not feel actively sad. I am neither restless, nor at rest. I feel nothing. Nothing at all, I hang suspended. I cannot even subscribe to boredom for that is too positive a word to describe my present state."

She heard him stirring uneasily just out of range of her vision, but she did not turn her head or discontinue her deliberate thoughts.

"I am tired. I suppose that may best describe my condition. Or perhaps the real answer is that I am already dead and this expensively simple room in gray and yellow is my grave. I am put away here with all the trappings of life like an Egyptian princess, or one of those ancient Chinese dignitaries whose pottery tomb attendants I have collected—have, indeed, helped to make popular as decorative accessories in the homes of the rich and cultivated. . . ." And again, without actually seeing anything, she looked; this time turning her head toward the cabinet of pottery figures—strumming musical instruments, dipping their long sleeves in the dance, coming carrying a duck, playing a flute—that she had brought back with her from the Orient many years before.

She saw herself, much younger but no slenderer, riding through a Peking dust storm with a scarf held over her nose and mouth, wishing that the gritty sand of the Gobi would magically disappear, that the Chinese coolies and vendors would not eternally cry out like strange birds in pain as she passed; wishing she was back in her apartment in New York among familiar objects, far from the necessities of drinking boiled water, avoiding leafy vegetables, putting olive oil in the bath every night to preserve her skin from the water's harshness. . . . Yet how profitable the Peking trip had been—though it had cost her, she often said, her last illusion. Nourished on preliminary reading she had imagined that the City of Northern Peace would have magic and beauty. But she had not found them. The Gate of Earthly Tranquility, the Hall of Pears and Pondweed, the Well of the Pearl Concubine—these existed in name only. In the capital of the legendary Manchus she had found only tiresome insular white residents, haggling native shop dealers, ruins of nameless emperors growing dusty grass in every crack and crevice. To be sure there had been treasure of another order for one who sought it: bolts of rare silk at bargain prices, art objects and cunning copies, rugs grown beyond price now because of wars. On the whole it had been her most successful commercial venture, and after all, nothing in life was ever what you expected it would be. This was a universal truth, and since she had long ago recognized it as fundamental she would be able to accept with philosophical detachment the departure of this young man from her life. For he was getting ready to move on—and she knew it. She had given him all she could. He had his own shop now in the East Fifties. A month ago he had been flown to Hollywood at the behest of the wife of a Selznick or a Warner to advise on a beach house. And only last week, at the Jennings' sale, he had coolly bid against her on the Venetian sconces.

Behind her, beside the low pine table, he was saying in a voice forced and teasing, "Magpie."

She did not turn her head. She knew what he meant; the bird that builds its nest of many oddments. He was fingering the little objects in a flat crystal dish. She could hear the faint clicking sound they made as they returned from his fingers—the crabs' claws, the small delicate bits of dried seaweed, coral, shell, pebble and tropical bean that were the sum of idle hours on distant beaches.

"One would think, Myra darling," he went on, "you were a nature lover."

She replied with perfect composure. "I do not know whether I love nature or not. How can I know? I use nature only to rest in, and the moment I am rested I am closed up within four walls again."

"What exotic bird shed those feathers on the desk?" he asked, still trying to make up to her for being so shrill ten minutes before.

He had been coming to her apartment for many months, fingering stuffs, handling objects, asking questions, exclaiming aloud, and he had never once noticed the turkey feathers. Yet she had brought them home from the Sunday luncheon in Bucks County where she had first met him.

She remembered vividly the autumn afternoon she had leaned down as they walked together to lift the bold Aztec signature of the feathers from the drying grass. Suddenly, leaning, she had felt happiness rush into her, out of some felicitous mingling of sun, wind, clouds and earth—and herself magically a part of it. Magically a part of it because of the presence of this young man with whom at the luncheon table she had established such a sympathetic accord. "Did you ever read the things D. H. Lawrence wrote about the Indians?" she had asked him. "He said—Lawrence—that the Indian has only one positive commandment: *'Thou shalt acknowledge the wonder.'* " "Ah!" His eyes had rushed toward her, ardent, eager. "Hands off!" Helen Abernethy had flashed earlier over the Sèvres soup tureen, but it was a warning sent in vain. "He is mine," Myra had told herself as she thrust the turkey feathers into the buttonhole of her jacket. She had brought them home and stuck them in a cork on her desk to keep them as reminder, as proof—of what? Of the existence of joy, that it can be caught out of the merest nothing, out of stooping near a barnyard in late October.

But the turkey feathers could not make that moment live again for her now. They were as dead as any Victorian mementoes, as pressed edelweiss in a volume of Tennyson. They were as lifeless as the dish filled with the tiny delicate fruit of the sea which could not bring back the foggy breath of Maine drifting on the water in the setting sun, the slow volplane of the gulls, their thin and windy keening.

"They are only turkey feathers," she answered his question. "And it is time I threw them out. They look tired, too."

"Are you tired?" he asked her politely.

"I am sick."

She was hardly aware that she had spoken. She rose and walked the length of the long room to look out the windows. She looked first into the empty sky thinking how it was possible that the special moment might come again to her, that sensation of unfolding, of participation. To be sure, it had been a long time since she had experienced it, but you never knew when it would happen, without warning, without search, suddenly in turning a page, or a corner—light falling on a wall, or words darting at you, *The New Moon Cold Over the Park*. Ah! The heart stirs, unfolds like a flower. . . .

With her back to him, "The Chinese and Japanese," she said aloud, "write a very different poetry from ours. It is simpler, shorter, more abstract. There is an old Japanese poem of seventeen syllables which says, *'Having seen all, my eye comes back, back to the yellow chrysanthemum.'*"

He murmured his appreciation. He had many charming and endearing qualities—but now he was bored. This enviable positive state was due to his thirty-six years and to his interest in archaic Greek statues, the preservation of the ballet, wine temperatures. His tastes were spun thin and fine. His nature could stand no pressures. Early in life he had been both stimulated and devitalized by Europe—a specialists' Europe to which he had remained always a little alien, carrying as he did the stigma of a Des Moines birth. Due to incipient ulcers he had not even been able to fight for the preservation of this dying European world. He was a delicate young man set apart from the fierce main stream of his era. And this was how she, a woman eighteen years his senior, could command for a time his mind and blood.

She broke off thinking about him, dropping her eyes to the children in the back yards of the ugly houses on which her windows incongruously faced. Under the faded laundry, blowing on the line in the little wind, the children were playing in the April mud. Mud pies, a substitute for the forbidden faeces, she had read somewhere. She put away the thought impatiently. We all know so much—over and under and around, but not the center. A, b, c and d, but never the x, the x of mystery, the answer to Why am I here at all?

"Do you ever dream?" she asked him abruptly, turning back into the room.

"Rarely. Do you?" His voice was guarded.

She returned to the yellow chair.

"I have spells of dreaming. Lately I have been dreaming my Chinese warning dreams."

"Warning you of what?"

She hesitated. "I don't know."

"Then how do you know they are warning you?"

"Because—" she broke off. "I know," she said positively.

After a moment of silence, she began in the rather hurried and unnatural voice with its overlay of self-consciousness that people use in relating their dreams to one another; the voice which says: *I know dreams are unreal so you will not listen. Yet they happen, they exist, often they seem more full of meaning than actual events, so please listen. It relieves me to speak of it.*

"Last night I had one of these dreams. I dreamt I was at lunch on Easter Sunday in the house of a very rich old woman whom I knew well—an invalid, confined to a wheel chair. As soon as we had risen from the luncheon table, we went directly into another room where there was more food. Here it was a buffet, set with very rich unusual dishes: caviar, curries, truffles, oysters—that sort of thing. Although I had had lunch and felt full, I went on compulsively eating. I looked at a green salad and thought rather guiltily, I really should eat something wholesome and green. And this salad led me, by one of those marvelous transpositions that are possible only in dreams, immediately into another room with tables covered with small Chinese carvings—jade, ivory, wood—little exquisite figures of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. I began to collect them greedily, thinking: Imagine what luck. These must be priceless. I must find a little Buddha for this little ivory grotto I have in my hand. . . . Then I awoke—and I had the most depressing sense of failure—of failure and warning."

"Really, Myra dear," he said gently, but with the faintest shadow of impatience. "What do you mean?"

Her voice flattened. "That I am still doing it, not doing it, walking around something, pretending that I don't know, evading—and yet, I swear, I can't see what it is I am supposed to know or do." Her voice had risen almost desperately.

He was coldly silent. She had never spoken this way. He dreaded scenes. His life had been filled with demanding middle-aged women and he recognized the symptoms of hysteria well in advance. She felt his fear, his withdrawal. Her scorn, she observed, had a taste sensation, a bitter taste in her mouth. How little he knew her to believe she would ever make a public spectacle. But in this mood she feared the solitude that would come later, and she tried now to give herself warning.

"Don't drop down, Myra!" she said severely. "Don't sink! You know how you always regret it. It takes so long to come back. Pin your thoughts on something tangible like the yards of rare toile that you are using to decorate your display windows this week—the artful accompaniment of objects, and the faces passing on the street, pausing to look in, to covet, this vase, that chair, this tea service in a room with drapes of old French cloth. . . ."

But instead she saw herself terribly young and alone, chilled and afraid, a lifetime ago on the morning train leaving Reno. There had been no one to see her off to New York—not even her lawyer—as there had been no one to greet her when she arrived in Reno. For she was not Myra Fordyce then, the world's most famous decorator of discreet hideaways for ex-kings and bold fronts for former gangsters. She was only a young Mrs. Ernest Blaine getting rid of her first and only husband, a hard-drinking writer of uninspired advertising copy . . . was she carrying striped tulips in this imaginary picture? She seemed to be —but she couldn't have been. No, those tulips were before Reno—or later—bought from a pushcart on Bleecker Street to arrange in her one good glass vase, to brighten the room for his coming—he of the face that had been frequently new in thirty years, yet always somehow the same. So that this man's face opposite her now in the gray and yellow room became only a part of a montage of faces—in the past older than she, in the present younger than she—the men who had been her friends and lovers in the restless ambitious years between the Village and the East Seventies.

"Yes, I am sick," she repeated aloud, "and I fell sick young in life."

She was acutely aware now of his alarm and distaste. But he did not have the strength of character, or the worldly assurance, to run from the room and save himself what was to come. He is trapped, she said to herself, by his glandular imbalance, and she rejoiced in his discomfiture.

She began then to talk as though she were reading something from a printed page—unfamiliar material, not easy to grasp.

"I fell sick when I was seven years old. I will tell you how it happened.

"I grew up in a small town in New Jersey. It sounds prosaic—and it was. We lived in a very ordinary brown shingle house with a nice big yard and some fine maple trees. My father worked in my grandfather's law office—or pretended to.

"I seldom speak of my father. We have all tried to forget him. He ran away from home with a woman when I was fourteen. I believe he drank, too. It is all of no consequence now—although I suppose it might be said that he killed my mother. Actually I think my mother was already dead and had been for some time, and that is why my father left her.

"I was my father's favorite child. He called me Mistress Mary. You know the old rhyme—*'quite contrary, how does your garden grow, with silver bells and cockle shells'* and so on. One day he came home with a little bright red watering can. To my older sister, Janice, and to me, he said (my mother was not in the room but I remember his speaking in a low and guarded voice): 'Girls,' he said. 'if you will water a corner of our lawn every day with this little watering can with just a spoonful of salt in it, I think you may have some wonderful results. I've been led to believe that this red watering can, plus a little salt and a lot of faith, will produce a crop of small sea shells. They'll appear right on the spot you've been watering.'

"I can remember my heart missing a beat.

"'Who told you?' asked my sister, Janice. She was always very practical and realistic. She wore glasses from the time she was six years old.

"'Never mind who told me,' said my father. 'Don't ask too many questions. It might break the spell.'

"'Is it magic?' I asked him.

"I can still see how he looked at me. 'Yes, magic,' he said. 'Pure and simple. Simple and pure.'

"Well, of course we watered like mad—both of us—for a week. Then Janice gave up. She could never sustain her interest in anything very long. I don't remember how many days I went out with that watering can. Certainly it was long enough to be a test of faith. My mother didn't approve of the watering. She said the salt would spoil the grass but I kept on anyway. Every morning before breakfast I ran to look. Finally one morning right under the maple, in the exact spot where I had been watering, there was a scattering of tiny assorted shells."

She paused in the story; took a long breath. Her hands were clasped loosely in her lap and now she tightened them perceptibly as she said in a low strained voice:

"I can see their little perfect forms on the green grass now—white and pink, black with specks, brown with stripes—minute, beautiful—"

She paused again.

"And I can still remember the feeling I had. There was never anything like it before or since in my life. Because of course it was a miracle—and I had wrought it. No, not exactly that. I didn't feel really responsible for it—except as one who has helped in revealing. I had made possible the revelation of the miracle—that was more the feeling. My faith had made it possible. I was completely uplifted. I shall never, never forget the sensation of—oh, how can I describe it? Participation is, I guess, the word. I felt a part of all miraculous and wonderful elements in the universe. Anything seemed possible from then on. Faith sustained was sure to be rewarded."

She broke off, made an impatient gesture, fell into a long silence.

"There is a sequel," she said finally. Her voice was now remote and very low.

"One day I was downtown with my father. This was some months after the miracle first occurred. It had been repeated a number of times by then. Not too often, just often enough. I never failed to visit the maple. It was my first thought on rising in the morning. By now I had two shoe boxes full of the little shells. I had lined the boxes with some silver paper. I only showed the collection to special people. Not once had the tiniest shadow of doubt fallen on my faith. Not even my mother had been able to disturb it, although she must have continued her disapproval of what I'm sure she considered dangerous deception and wicked falsehood.

"As I was saying—I was downtown with my father. This in itself was a rare occurrence. I don't remember the occasion for it, but we passed a little shop that carried assorted odds and ends, like pipe tobacco and tissue paper Halloween hats, and American flags and striped peppermint candy, and my father stepped inside to buy some smoking tobacco. And the little old man behind the counter said, 'Well, Mr. Fordyce, you've not been in lately for any shells.' "

Again her hands in her lap tightened. She dropped her head forward so that her face was turned away from the young man's. Her voice was barely audible as she went on:

"I was looking at licorice whips. I was just going to ask for one. To this day I cannot bear the scent of licorice. . . . I don't remember anything else about it. I do remember that I had been holding my father's hand before we got to the store. After that I didn't reach for it and he didn't reach for mine. We walked home apart, separated, alone as you are always alone in death—in life for that matter. . . . I'm glad now that he didn't reach for my hand. It lets me know how awfully he felt about what had happened, and his part in it. He was speechless, dumb, like me, feeling my terrible paralyzing disillusionment and knowing there was nothing to say that would help. Nothing, nothing at all that anyone could ever say to me to help."

Her voice was so unnatural that he hesitated to speak and silence fell about them both heavily. After some moments during which a distant clock spoke five times with ponderous decorum she said quietly: "It is my last clear memory of my father. After that we were total strangers. When he left our home for good I was already away at a convent, and so I didn't feel anything, or so it seems to me as I look back on it." She tapered off.

"And the shells?" he asked her finally. "Where are they? Didn't you keep them?"

She lifted her face. Her voice was now quite natural, clear, serene, a little amused. "You know it's a strange thing. I don't remember anything at all about those boxes. I have no idea what became of them. I put the whole thing completely out of my mind for years."

"And the red watering can?"

She could hear the relief in his voice; relief because in the end she was just making another story of it.

"It too," she said. "I can't remember a thing about it."

"I'm surprised you didn't keep the symbols of your miracle."

She made no reply.

"You know this explains a lot to me about you," he began after a moment, his voice also like hers, natural, serene, interested, faintly amused.

But at his words she rose quickly, interrupting him. "I know," she said hurriedly, "I know. I've read all the books too. I have been searching for my father for over half my lifetime. And participation in a miracle young in life unbalanced me—led me always to expect them—in spite of my painful discovery of the 'reality.' Well, I'm glad it happened—that miracle. Up to now it has kept me alive—believing it might happen again. And at moments I've had glimpses—gleams and glimmers. I've never been quick enough, or perhaps patient enough, to catch it, to hold it, that's all." She broke off.

In a moment, her voice bitter, she added, "Ah, yes, indeed, I too have read the books, my dear. They make it all so simple, so easy and plain—and so utterly inadequate to explain a wasted and unhappy life."

She rose quickly from her chair for the second time and, like one who completes a long-planned action, she walked resolutely across to the window and raised it. After raising it and glancing out she reached behind her for the three turkey feathers in the cork on her desk. At her action he had risen in alarm. He can only think "suicide," she thought to herself wryly, because his imagination is really a hackneyed affair, a stereotype.

"Children," she called aloud, "children."

At her cry the children in the back yard lifted their faces to her windows—guarded, slow. She was intruding on their mysterious rites. They would not admit her.

"Children, here are some feathers," she cried more loudly. "Magical feathers. Feathers from a Never Never Bird."

She released the feathers from her hand but the wind promptly carried them away around the corner of the house and dropped them in the narrow space between two back yards. She saw them flutter down, saw them lie there among the scraps of paper, the bits of nameless refuse. The children had not understood, had not even heard her words. The same wind that blew the feathers away had blown her words away above their heads, around the corner. After a moment of gazing up at her without expression they returned gravely to their mud pies. Slowly she closed the window.

MY GRANDMOTHER'S NOSE

by Prudencio de Pereda

The night my grandmother told me this story, we were watching each other. She had been sent to our house to spend the evening with me because I had a cold and the family was going out—so my mother told her! My mother told me that she didn't like the way Grandmother brooded. She didn't want her to be alone, she said.

"You're watching me, and I'm watching you," my grandmother said. "These poor bourgeois fools of my daughters think that we might kill ourselves. You," she said, in that faultlessly calm English that showed the perfection of forty years' care but that still held a Spanish construction, "because you have lost your girl—and I, because my mind has grown so tired of carrying a dead body. . . . They can't seem to learn that even suffering is living."

She was seventy-two, and, when I awoke, I had found her lying beside me on the bed with the afghan thrown over the long, black taffeta skirt, and a cigarette held in her delicate, grayish fingers. The black taffeta covered four petticoats, and the black shirt waist had a high, bizarre color. She smelled of a light perfume and the strong, deep incense that she still used in her apartment—in spite of so many protests. My grandmother made you think—as you looked at her—that old age must have a distinctive beauty of its own.

"I'm not losing my girl," I said to her. "I'm just giving up the fight."

"The fight?" She did not look at me, but drew in on her cigarette to push the question.

"I don't think I'll ever make it, Grandmother. I think she's way out of my class."

"That sounds very bourgeois," my grandmother said. She did not turn to look at me. She had belonged to one of the noblest families in Andalucía and used the term "bourgeois" in complete scorn. She disliked French, and always pronounced it as the Spanish "burgues." "It's very burgues," she said, "and it seems strange to come from you."

"It's straight! I guess I'm just a little tired, now, so I don't see much hope—so I guess I'd better just let go."

"Has she told you to go? Has she told you to go away?"

"No, but she hasn't told me to stick. She hasn't told me that she loves me—that she wants me."

"There are so many ways," my grandmother said—after a moment. "There are so many ways." she said. "You have to be quite quick to catch some." She held her cigarette away, and looked at me. "I think you're quick," she said. . . . She kept looking at me. "But, maybe you're tired, now—as you say. . . . And maybe, you're not looking. You're afraid to look. I don't want you to do that. I don't want you to miss on anything. You're very special." She turned and puffed on her cigarette. "You're the only good thing that ever happened to me since I left Spain." She looked back at me with the cigarette still in her lips. She did not smile.

"I brought you some brandy," she said, then. "Would you like some?"

"I'll get it," I said, as I went to get up. "I'll get it. I can get up."

"Stay there," my grandmother said. She put her hand on my shoulder and then pushed the afghan away, and got up slowly. "I'm to take care of you," she said. "Don't forget that."

She moved away slowly, but with that same delicate care. She held herself very erect, though she had never been to any success school, and moving along with that thin elegance, she suggested how much she must have been when young.

When she came back, she gave me my glass and then lay down again. She propped the pillow up and put the afghan over her legs. I had to sit up to take mine, but my grandmother sipped her brandy—with the same delicacy—while still lying back. The cigarette was still in her hand.

"I'll make you some manzanilla, before I go. That will let you sleep," she said.

"I don't feel like sleeping, now."

"There's something about good brandy that makes you want to never die," my grandmother said; and then, without stopping, and without looking at me, she said, "I never told this story to anyone. I've always wanted to tell it to you. I want to tell it to you, now, because it's about a man who gave up the fight—as you say."

She looked at her brandy glass, and then over at me. "Take a long sip and lie down," she said. "You shouldn't be uncovered. . . . When I was very young," she said, "I was very beautiful. You've probably heard some stories about it, but they could never really tell it."

She took a light sip at the brandy. "I couldn't go out to the beach very much, even though I loved to bathe. I was followed and courted—that's permitted in Spain, you know—and I was very shy and didn't like it. I never wanted to go out into the street without my father. Even when I was with my duenna, the men would come up to me. That is permitted in Spain, too.

"I was very beautiful," my grandmother said, "—very, very beautiful! I used to walk across my room toward the big mirror and love myself when I reached there. I used to do that every time I was dressed to go out, and I had a thin white nightdress that I used to put on especially to do that.

"I had plenty of admiration from men—and many courters—but I didn't seem to want that. I loved my beauty and I loved myself, and I didn't want that beauty to be spoiled. Marriage seemed to do that—even love seemed to do that. You could not separate the two.

"I married your grandfather in a strange way," she said. "He'd been married to my best friend, and she had died just a year after the marriage. We'd grown very close while I'd been caring for her, and he was a very kind and soft man. You knew him when he'd grown bitter, but he was very gentle and kind when we were young.

"He didn't seem to spoil my beauty," Grandmother said, "but then, he didn't seem to make it his either. It seemed all mine, still, and it was a little dead, now.

"We went to live in Tangiers when his bank opened a branch there—and your mother was born when we'd been there only a short while. . . . A smallpox epidemic started just at that time, and I got it. . . . I should have been glad," my grandmother said, "because my daughter and my husband were spared—but I couldn't feel that. I was miserable!

"You see, it seemed to concentrate in my face—in my nose. The stupid fool of a first doctor—the best in Tangiers—told me that I would probably lose my nose. He was very concerned about it, but he was still very definite." My grandmother rubbed her nose. It was still a beautifully shaped patrician nose.

"He had to take the baby away," she said, "and he sent your grandfather to live in a hotel. Then, the fool went away himself. He was very, very frightened.

"I was very frightened, myself—but not for the same reasons! I wasn't afraid of dying, and I didn't miss my daughter or your grandfather. I was frightened of losing my nose. I was frightened of having my beauty spoiled—before it had become alive, before it had lived for me." She smiled, but she did not look at me. She sipped at her drink.

"You know, a man may look at a woman's legs first, or at her bust and hips—but it always seemed to me that beauty is in the eyes, in the face. I always thought of mine like that, anyway—even though my body was very beautiful. . . . The face seemed a mirror, a center, and the eyes looked right at you." She turned to me this time as she smiled. "I'd been studying mine a lot, you see. . . . Take away that nose, I thought, and there would be horror. I thought of my face as a mask, as becoming a horrible mask, with two holes in it!

"I couldn't get any consolation out of religious thoughts, out of thinking of wearing a veil, and I couldn't get any solace out of the fact that your grandfather would always 'love' me. . . . My beauty was going to be spoiled," my grandmother said, "it was going to be spoiled at last, and never in the way I thought."

She took another sip of the brandy, and then took a last puff at her cigarette and reached over to ground it out.

"All this was even more horrible," she said, "because it was dark. I was alone, and it was dark. . . . I was used to being alone, but I couldn't stand the darkness. Everything seemed truly horrible, then—as if it were the truth forever.

"Before the maid had left, she'd done me a last service. She'd tied my wrists to the sides of the bed. . . . In smallpox, the danger is that you'll scratch. The sores will grow deeper, and you'll have terrible scars if you survive. . . . So, she had really done me a service.

"I lay awake in that dark room with my face a hot torture. The fears and horrors came to me in the dark, and I clenched my hands. I wept, I think. . . . There was a fever, too, and that helped the fear along. It helped the horrors. . . . The worst horror of all was that I was losing my beauty—in the darkness and in the fever. . . . I didn't think of my child. I didn't think of my husband. I didn't even think of whether I'd live or die. I just thought of losing my nose, of all of my beauty being spoiled."

"After a few hours—it might have been much less than that," she said, "—a little Semite doctor came to see me. He was very young—his beard was still tawny—and he had that calm, quiet dignity that the Semites have in their own country. . . . I thought that he had been sent by my doctor. I thought that the fool must have had a sudden rush of conscience and sent this young doctor. He wouldn't risk it himself, but he could order someone else. . . . I found out later it wasn't like that. I found out later that he had come on his own. He had been admiring me many days before that, and, when he learned that I was ill with the pox, he came up.

"When he came in, and I saw who he was, I became the great lady. I resented being sent a 'second' doctor—a doctor that could be spared—and a Semite! I told him to go away. Everything in me burned to ask for some help, but I told him to go away. He smiled at me very kindly, and said, 'Please, senora!' Then, he waited a moment and started to take the cords from my wrists. 'I don't think we're going to need these,' he said. He had a soft, beautiful voice. 'No,' he said. 'No, we won't need these.' He put some ointment on my face—with the same softness as his voice—and the burning itching seemed to soothe at once. Then, he gave me a sleeping potion."

My grandmother took a sip at her brandy. She seemed to wet her lips only, but the smile showed how much she enjoyed it.

"I don't know whether I slept very long," she went on, "but it didn't seem very long, and when I woke up, it was still very dark. The itching had come back more strongly than ever, and I woke up because there was a pressure holding my wrists down. I must have been trying to bring my hands up to my face. . . . When I opened my eyes, he was sitting at my bedside and holding my wrists—with a light touch, but very strongly. I worked to get my wrists free, but he held on very strongly and smiled softly at me. 'The itching will pass soon,' he said. 'It will pass soon, senora.' "

"I was enraged at this little Semite who sat at my bedside as if he meant to stay. 'Why don't you go with the others?' I said. 'Aren't you afraid?'

" 'No,' he said, smiling. 'No.' He was holding both my wrists in one of his long-fingered hands and putting some ointment on with the other. 'I am not afraid,' he said. . . . And his ointment seemed to work again, because the itching stopped and I went to sleep again.

"I woke up when the itching came back. . . . He was still there. As he soothed my pain, I ranted at him. I ranted at that ugly, dignified little Semite. 'Why do you do this?' I said. 'Why do you take such risks?'

" 'Because I love you,' he said with great calm.

" 'And will you love me when I lose my nose—when I am horrible and not beautiful?'

" 'I will love you then, but you will always be beautiful,' he said. 'If you lost your nose, I would be even happy—because you would be so beautiful and I could be sure of you then. A poor little man like me could have a queen.'

" 'You are a poor little man!' I hissed at him. 'Is this the way you win a woman? Do you wait until she's horrible and ugly and afraid?'

" 'With you, yes,' he said. 'You would not have looked at me twice before. . . . And you will not lose your nose,' he said. 'I promise you that.'

"He'd finished with the ointment, and the itching began to go away again. I slept again, and awoke to new itching—but he was there again with the soothing ointment. I woke up many times during that night, and he was always there. Towards the morning, I slept for a long time.

"When I woke up that time," my grandmother said, "there was a beautiful young girl sitting by the bed. She smiled at me when I woke up, and then, when she saw that I was calm, she gave me some soup and washed me. The Jewesses that you see in New York have been corrupted by Russian and German blood, but in Spain and Morocco, you see the pure Jewess. This was a beautiful Esther—the most beautiful woman I had ever seen—shining black hair and eyes, lovely olive skin, and a ripe fruitful body.

"I said to my little man when he came back later, 'You have a very beautiful nurse.' 'Oh, that isn't my nurse,' he said. 'A nurse would be afraid to come. That is my wife,' he said. 'I ordered her to come.' He smiled at me—a sly smile, I thought.

"He stayed with me that night, and the girl stayed during the day. He was on his calls during the day, so I don't know when he slept. What I know is that I was never civil to him, and I never thanked him.

"During the fourth night, he told me that he thought he could call my own doctor back. The danger had passed—and I was safe. I was not to lose my nose. I would not even be scarred, he said.

"I remember that there was no itch at that time, and I felt very calm and even happy—but I could not get myself to thank him. I just stared up at him, and I remember that I opened my lips to ask him about his fee—he seemed to know what I was thinking. 'I have been paid,' he said. Then, he made a little bow to me, and said, 'Good night, my queen!' He did not even dare to touch my hand."

My grandmother let the last drops of the brandy slip down on to her lips. She moved her tongue over her lips and turned to look at me. She looked at me for a long moment, when she turned back, she said, "I was much improved the next day—and I was up in three days. Your grandfather and his friends all congratulated me on my luck. They told me how well and 'beautiful' I looked. But I couldn't believe it," she said. "No. It was true that everything was all right, that I had no scars and that my face was whole—but I seemed very plain and cold to myself. . . . I knew myself, too!" She turned to look at me, and smiled. "I knew what my beauty was—and it wasn't there, now.

"When I was fully better, your grandfather got a transfer back to Spain and we planned to leave Morocco." My grandmother stopped, but did not turn to look at me. "My beauty began to come back," she said, "on the last morning. I could feel it as soon as I had decided a certain thing, and I saw it and felt it through the whole morning. I had decided something very definitely, and when I packed, I packed my own things separately from your mother's and grandfather's. Then, I dressed myself in my most beautiful clothes and I walked toward the mirror. I knew that I was beautiful! I told your grandfather to take the child to the pier with him, that I wanted to say goodbye to my nurse. I used the danger of infection for not taking the child. Then, I took a carriage and went to the home of the little man in the Semite quarter. I found that his house was a clean little house on a corner, but he wasn't there. His wife was there and she seemed to sense why I had come because she did not ask me in. I said something silly and conventional and then left and went back to the hotel for my trunks.

"When I was coming out again, I caught sight of him standing on the corner and looking at me. He had come to have a last look. If he had been at the house, I would have stayed with him forever."

My grandmother stared at her glass, and then turned to put it on the floor. When she turned back to me, I had got up on my elbow and was watching her. She reached out her hand and rubbed my cheek. "You Spaniards are badly brought up, too," she said. "That story about the Queen of Spain having no legs is so typical. If you think a woman is a queen, you must treat her like that—as a woman and a queen!" She gave my cheek a gentle pat and smiled, "All women have legs . . . and a nose . . . and other things. Remember that!" she said.

I nodded and smiled.

"And don't ever tell this story to your mother—or to the others. . . . It was just for you," she said.

"I know."

"Now, give the queen a kiss," she said.

JORDAN

by George P. Elliott

JORDAN *very tired and futile feeling is waiting for a street-car, lunchbox in hand. Street-car pulls up and Jordan gets in. At the ring of the token in the machine, the face of every passenger suddenly turns on Jordan and every passenger is a shipyard worker wearing a hard hat. Every seat is taken and only Jordan stands. He remains in the front of the car. The first person he looks at carefully enough to notice is a middle-aged fleshy Mexican woman with a great wen on her nose. Her eyes are incurious and uncensoring but look directly at Jordan. The man next to her has a large, pulpy, magenta-brown birthmark that spreads over the right side of his face and nose. Jordan looks out of a window, but hair smears blur the windows and there is nothing but the dirty homes of workers to look at, with blinds or starched curtains over the windows.*

Jordan looks back in the car. The sounds of the street-car are the only noises audible; the car doesn't stop even for cross streets. Jordan gradually becomes aware that every face he sees is hideous. Something is wrong with every nose: some are large and bulby, some are snout-like, some cruelly thin with tufts of black hair sticking out like the wax image of Jesse James in sideshows, some, on toothless old women, nearly meet their chins, some are holes eaten away by syphilis, one face of a seemingly young smooth-skinned man is quite without a nose or even holes for a nose. When Jordan finally notices him (his face is somewhat obscured by the shadow of his hard hat), the street-car seems to lurch more than before and make more noise.

Jordan is frightened. He takes his handkerchief furtively from his pocket and starts to blow his nose. Animated suddenly, he jerks at his nose, he waggles it furiously, then relapses. He wilts and staggers as he stands. An aged wrinkled Negro woman with a bone through the septum of her nose arises and helps Jordan to her seat. Great tears roll down his cheeks and from time to time he pinches his nose as if it were not there. After he is seated, all the workers laugh very abandonedly, roll in their seats and embrace each other, all without sound. But Jordan is *too absorbed in his grief to react. He only looks at them from time to time through his tears.*

Then the street-car driver turns around and says in a clear voice, "You'd better watch out; I can't keep the rats out much longer." Everyone in the street-car looks to see if the windows and doors are shut, and then put their hard hats over their faces. Jordan follows suit, and immediately feels greatly relieved. It is dark inside the hard hat and the steam of his breath feels warm and moist on his face. "It doesn't matter if they can get in," he says to himself. "It's gone already. I can't imagine what happened to it, but they are too late." He tries to touch his nose with his tongue, but it still isn't there. "Anyway I'll stay like this just to make sure. It's safer."

Perhaps Jordan's greatest misfortune was that he couldn't get used to what happened again and again in the world around him. His palate would not make a habit of his landlady's boiled dinners; he noticed with care the special ways the women he worked with masked themselves with lipstick, powder and Max Factor; he could not bear radio static; he was never unaware of the EXIT signs in movies; he had moved from a former house in west Berkeley because instead of a lawn there was a blanket of green cement spread over the ground in front of the house. Jordan didn't strike most people as being very odd, for he didn't inflict himself upon them much. Besides he actually wasn't very odd: he just didn't stop noticing what most people observe once or twice and then ignore. He was poorly insulated.

The extent of his misfortune was important, however, because of the jobs he had. He had spent his early manhood surviving the Depression, so he knew pretty well what to expect from a job and how to avoid what he wanted to avoid. But since the war, since the shipyard and the housing shortage, since the manpower freeze especially, there were left to him nearly no alternatives to what he already had and was. A man with no special skill or knowledge, in the draft board's open file but over thirty and (to the file) a journeyman welder, with a father unforgotten in an Illinois poor-house, a man without love, unmarried even—what was there for him but that formula-life which is thought up by other men who don't have to live it or believe it themselves? He became a weld checker: like other integers in 1943 such as a rotary drill press or the wage for paint mixers, a part of a number in a column of figures on an inter-office memorandum. They sang to him (Any Bonds of Freedom, Any Bonds Today?). When they launched a ship they praised him, all twenty thousand of him, and gave him a free coca-cola; when he was late to work they stamped a swastika on his time-card. There were more than thirty thousand workers in his union, and they called him "Dear Sir and Brother" on the letters that they sent him; the time when he went to a meeting there weren't forty members present and those stared at him as he came in and sat down, and didn't speak to him all evening. They had a Personnel Department for him, with case history cards that presented the numerical facts of his life, his fingerprints and a large space for his misdeeds. They sold him vitamin pills at cost and played him records at the lunch hour; they had a nurse on duty for his sprains and flashes, but they could prove that welders' lungs weren't an occupational disease. Like everybody else he knew all this; it's just that he never didn't know it. That was his trouble, that and the yard itself.

He had chosen the graveyard shift after a couple of months of day shift, deliberately, intending to avoid some of the noise and some of the intense political ambitiousness that spread like pink-eye through all ranks of the workers from the superintendents to the very helpers and sweepers. He could be alone more. Yet he could never accept as parts of the industrial climate those outrages which every hour inflicted upon his senses; not only because they were violent but because they were without continuity or pattern.

The noise, for instance. It was liable to cease suddenly and leave him in an abrupt silence shouting some banality or some buffoonish endearment (one expressed affection by means of thumps and slaps and shouts and practical jokes). The noise was without rhythm, and this particularly baffled Jordan who was sensitive to the subtlest rhythms in dance music; some flanger would establish a heavy beat with his hammer and then shatter it totally with a thump. The wonderful complexity and even variety of rhythms in the engine-room of a ship at sea were here lacking utterly. No one sang, except Negroes or hillbillies who weren't yet used to this fierce place and would pull their welding hoods over their faces to croon themselves to sleep in the only privacy they had. Air hoses squealed, cranes whistled or bonged warning, welders' arcs crackled like dry brush burning, bolters-up clanked, steel hit steel—and all irregularly. Reamers working the rivet holes in the shell-plating would set up a hair-line crescendo that arched like a rocket upward and burnt out high where he could hardly stand it but would be left taut-necked, head pained to one side, heart pounding when the thin note faded. But mostly there were the chippers and their murderous guns, beveling, cleaning off burrs, gouging out bad welds. Everywhere on the ship their racket became with welding smoke part of the natural world, the medium in which phenomena occurred, like salt water to sharks or profit to salesmen. Sometimes when he worked in the fore or after peak tanks or in the double bottoms, chippers would beat the skin of the drum in which he was working until the shock of their beat became something inside him, a pulse in his guts, a swelling in his chest that made breathing effortful, a rent in his brain, so that in the daytime he could swallow only milk and dazed rather than slept in bed. The other workers accommodated to all but the worst of these: drank too much or just expected it. They also tolerated the war and the red-tape; they were bewildered and their disaffection was unfocussed, beaten into a kind of acceptance, a self-protecting, an indifference.

He had worked in the Standard Oil refinery in Richmond, toward the end of the Depression, as a stationary engineer in the central pumphouse. It paid good money, there were lots of compensations like insurance and retirement funds, but he had hated it—hated the company, the company union, the smell, the view, the way he didn't feel left alone. But he was married then; he had a child to support then. So he stayed on and on, two years or more. And the rhythm of the pumps had helped to sustain him. The rich bell-tone beat of the big pump, the nervous rap of the small ones, the hesitant, the pulsing, the diligent, the syncopated and the solid one-step, the anxious—sometimes their counterpoint so absorbed him that he stood lost in a slack-jaw abstraction, then startled up exhausted as a dancer to find the hour past and his gauges unread, his pumps unoiled; guiltily he caught up on his tasks and then relaxed into his otherself. If a pump were seriously off-beat he would stop it and start it again and again till it synchronized with his needs. The pumps liberated his tension; they gave him confidence, made him brave for a little while. And they exhausted him and sunk him dangerously into his otherself: their rhythms were inflexible, inexorable. When his child died of infantile paralysis he divorced his wife; they hadn't tried to have intercourse more than twice in the year before. Then he went to work in the shipyard. The shipyard was a bad trade in one way for Standard: there wasn't anywhere compensation like the pumphouse gave him. It was a bad deal, and he didn't much like liquor. A bad deal. The noise here, like an experienced enemy, isolated you first and then attacked. He didn't like it, but he was frozen to his job. The President said he was frozen, and an Agency knew about him. To the file he was a journeyman welder, unmarried, one dependent, had oval closed whorls on his left index finger and a scar across his left thumb, was #27398, six feet, one hundred fifty-five pounds, blue-eyed, brown-haired, and (preferably) insensate.

Jordan was the weld checker for the engine rooms. For more than thirteen months he had looked, and looked again, at every foot of welding finished by all three shifts of welders, seen that it was passable, and recorded the number of feet welded. At first, two years ago, he himself had welded. He had sat watching the half inch of steel-melting flame sputtering its path on the other side of his welding hood, hour after day after week, lying on his back, squatting, standing looking up, crouched, cold stiff, choked inside his huge leather overalls and jacket and gloves, eyes grainy, arms and neck pitted with little craters made by hot steel balls, unrelaxed totally and always. But it made him cough too much and not sleep enough. Worst of all, everyone said it would sterilize a man, welding. The rays would do it. He had welded eleven months when he heard of this danger. He had wanted to quit the yard altogether, but they had kept him in the department at the same pay, checking weld.

They assigned him to the engine rooms, where there was a density of confusion greater than any he had ever before known. All the crafts in the metal trades catalogue worked here, and all at the same time. The terrific pressure to get the work out, the inexperience and floating uneasiness of the workers, and the actual complexity of an engine room produced an unblueprinted chaos of shapes and sounds that shriveled Jordan. Management manifested itself to the engine room workers only in the form of directives issued for increased output, and of their foremen's unceasing irritability. For Jordan the articulation of all the human and metal and rubber and wooden elements of an engine room was never clear: the delicate work of the machinists or the ship's engineers, the spider-webbing of the pipefitters, the violence of the riggers and chippers, the macabre, the loud, the unpatterned arrangements of objects—all these he marveled at as they came upon him, or avoided, or was offended by. The general idea of an engine room, much less of a whole ship, he knew only as he knew the workings of the Federal Government—more likely than a myth but less real.

Checking weld wasn't so bad, he was left alone at it. He had to walk around a great deal and he had no watchful leaderman; when there was no work he had to keep out of sight. That is how he came to be acquainted with so many people, came to have any friends to eat lunch with, roll craps with, bet with on the World's Series. That is how he came to know Jerry at all, and came to ride to work in the car pool with her.

He had found her in the double bottoms, in the starboard tank of Hull Seven, a week or so before it was to be launched, asleep with her hood over her face. He was embarrassed to have to move her, but he had to check the weld at the shell above where she lay. She sat aside while he lay on his belly and flashed his light along the weld.

"Cigarette?" she said when he started to back away.

"Thanks."

"Set a while," she said. "My leaderman told me to hide out here awhile. Said if he needed me he'd holler."

It was quiet enough to talk, since there was only checking and pick-up work to be done on the hull now.

"Ain't you cold?" said Jordan.

"Not too bad. If it gets too cold I'll call me a burner to keep me hot."

They sat smoking awhile, she looking squarely at him, he silent with wishing to say something.

"Say," she said, "I think I've seen you. You used to get on the same bus I rode. You used to get on at Sixty-eighth and Grove Street, didn't you?"

Her voice was very resonant and warm, and her r's were soft.

"Yes I did. Where do you live?"

"I live on the corner of Seventy-second and Grove. But I got a ride now, in a *Stutz*. *Longest* damn car you ever saw and it ain't got any side windows. But it's better than that bus."

"You're sure lucky; I've tried for six months to get a ride but there don't seem to be any round nowadays."

"Well say, now, maybe you'd like to take Harvey's place. He's going into the army next Monday."

Jordan replied too low:

"Thanks a lot. I really appreciate that."

She told him where to meet the car and her; he crawled away when she lay indolently back in the curve of the bilge plate. There was no more for him to say.

He hadn't ridden in the car pool three days before he knew that Jerry had a husband on day shift in one of the Richmond shipyards and a four-year-old son who went to nursery school. It was a standard source of humor for husband and wife to work different shifts—a kind of acknowledgment of marketability. One of the other riders in the car, Hank, would slap Jerry on the thigh and ask her in a Mae West nasal when he could come up and see her some time, but she would snuggle up to Jordan and say she'd brought a boy friend along to keep the wolves away. The other riders would talk about sport or the night's work or their past jobs; no one mentioned politics or the war except in passing, and they all hated the shipyard.

Jordan would meet the Stutz in front of his house at twenty minutes to eleven at night, buy a box lunch at the gate to the yard, check more weld than anyone else in the yard for seven hours, eat lunch on the hull where he was working—now with Jerry if she were not working much over a quarter of a mile away—go home and sleep ten hours during the day, maybe read a magazine at night or go to a movie. It was always the same. Wednesdays he had off; he would go to the races if they were on, or to a fight. Once in a while he would see in the evening someone he knew at the yard and they would have a couple of drinks. He had no women, whores froze him. Jerry was the only person since his daughter had died who knew him not as a passer-by or purchaser and liked what she knew.

Jordan is trying to climb through the network of pipes and hoses in the engine room, between the steady bearing foundations, in order to get into the double bottoms. After great contortions he manages to get to the tank top, but has to lie at full length under the pipes. He cannot find the manhole into the double bottoms. Finally he finds it, way out of its proper place. A cover is lying diagonally across it. He laboriously pushes the cover off, then very cautiously slips through the manhole head first.

Everything in the double bottoms is phenomenally clean, spotless as a sheet, at first. He feels greatly relieved. Then his flashlight catches through a lightening hole a pile of excrement. Anxiety presses on him; he scurries up and down every floor looking for intermittent weld. His motions become automaton-like. He tries to ignore the puddles of urine and the excrement he sees. He goes like a figure in an animated cartoon. Suddenly he comes upon a welder lying on her back asleep with the hood down. He can tell it is a woman by the scarlet fingernails. Something about her makes him very uneasy. He goes even faster in his inspection.

When he is finished he goes back to the manhole; the cover is over it, *and bolted down. He very calmly crawls to the woman welder and tries to awaken her. He suddenly notices how huge she seems; he becomes aware that she is his mother—how, it is impossible for him to tell, since no one is recognizable in welder's leathers with a hood pulled over the face. He is petrified by a piercing screech that begins above any audible tone and interminably descends, seemingly without origin or direction. He becomes taut with anxious suspense, waiting each time for the next thin paroxysm of sound to release itself from everything sane.*

He snaps out of his abstraction and remembers his predicament. He is undecided for a moment, then he pulls an automatic out of his left pocket and shoots three bullets into the woman's belly, feeling enormously relieved immediately. But she is only aroused by the shots and gets up to come after him, without removing her hood. She is huge: her back nearly touches the tank top as she comes on hands and knees toward him. He is in almost total panic, but he scrambles through two or three lightening holes in the hope she cannot squeeze through. She does get through, however, very slowly—her blank black face, with the glass slit reflecting the beam of his flash, faced directly at him. The screeching continues. He plunges on, dropping his flashlight, now through a wrapping, wide-eyed total absence of light, and rams his nose with crushing force against a flat bar stiffener. He collapses and as he is about to pass out he hears a hot breath of cruel laughter over his body.

Jordan knew that he worked too hard to be liked in the weld checking department. He was given more "hot" jobs beside his regular engine room work—which was the hardest area of all—than anyone else. It was not that he wanted to work hard; he simply could not help it. He felt the strong need of performing all and more than all the tasks that he was set to. He noted all the cracked welds he saw; he noted a broken tank-level-indicator bulb if he found one; he actually looked at every inch of welding in the double bottoms. He felt warm and proud when he reported a missing tilting bracket that another checker would have ignored since strictly speaking it was shipfitter business. The foreman once said something about needing another leaderman for the assembly platforms but Jordan said something about how you could work better in a place you were used to, and the matter died. His greatest anxiety was coming upon lovers in the double bottoms, as he had done, one time particularly. The man had raised his head and looked at him through a lightening hole as if he were an unexpected rodent till he had stumbled on mumbling apology.

He took to watching the sunrise from Siberia, down by the Estuary waterfront. He felt he deserved the half-hour peace of dawn; no one missed him; it was a change of air. The sun behind the Oakland hills to the east would upstand the pines on the fringe of skyline he could see, separate as bayonets. It would make brilliant for a minute high windows in the San Francisco buildings across the Bay and lowering from them would soften the dark masses of the pylons of the Bay Bridge. No one else watched the shore of shadow recede like Jordan: the operators of the gigantic whirley cranes pulled their hatbrims down to keep the glare from their eyes and the guards warmed their feet by thousand-watt light globes they kept in their sentry shacks. One of the guards in Siberia talked to him about Swedenborg and Nostradamus and Aimee Semple McPherson, but the guards rotated from week to week and the others scarcely stared at him.

Jordan met Cliff, the hull engineer in his car pool, here one morning, standing staring at the morose silt of the Estuary and the eroded mudflats. Siberia was a badly catalogued wilderness of rusting steel, some straight from the mills, some fabricated for use on the ships. On the opposite shore, lifeless as shards of a low civilization, warehouses sagged toward the water, and auto bodies, driftwood, bottles, shanties, lay in visible decay.

"Behold!" said Cliff (after Jordan had said "Good morning."). "Did you ever notice, Jordan, that the only living things in this place are rats, men and mudweeds? There's a lawn in front of the front office, but there are four signs on it saying 'Keep off the grass.' There are probably some fleas."

This was the sort of talk that Jordan could not keep up. He shifted from foot to foot and asked Cliff what he was doing tonight.

Cliff replied by saying, "Did you ever think what this shipyard is all about? Did you? Well don't start now if you didn't."

Jordan began clicking *Pop Goes the Weasel* with his teeth.

"You check weld, don't you, Jordan?"

"Yes."

"How long you been checking weld?"

"Oh, little over thirteen months."

"What do you know about intermittent weld?"

"Now say, that's something I've wanted to know about. I heard that the floors, except the watertight floors, were supposed to be intermittent, and the beams, some of them. Well sometimes they are intermittent and sometimes they aren't. I used to try and find out but nobody seemed to care. Mostly they are intermittent nowadays."

Cliff pulled out a piece of paper covered with scribbled figures.

"I just spent two shifts figuring out how much welding was wasted on these tubs. On Hull Three the A.B.S. and design architects decided to make all non-tight beams, stiffeners and floors intermittent. But Gessler the weld super and the Maritime Commissioners aren't so sure. What with this and that, the weld leadermen don't know what to do, and they have practically everything welded up solid. Can you blame them?

"O.K. I just spent two full shifts counting every stiffener, beam and floor on Hull Six, practically ready to commission now, that don't have intermittent weld. This is Hull Six, where they've had three hulls to learn already. Altogether there are over fifty thousand feet pure waste; on the inside, you understand. Fifty thousand feet is *18,750* manhours at least. And just on following a simple order. By Jesus. I do not see how they launch these ships. I do not. Must be somebody working damn hard. I do not."

Jordan was very silent. He knew that Cliff's facts were probably right, but he did not like to look at them. Like the war, he could dispose of his abstract knowledge of this waste most of the time. He could formally inveigh against the shipyards, or fulminate against shipyard politicians, along with the other workers; this ritualistic, corner-drug-store talk at once acknowledged and dismissed what was too big to hate and too terrifying to understand.

Jordan resented Cliff, but he thought he only felt uneasy. He also resented pacifists and the Salvation Army bands on corners; he avoided them because they made him feel uncourageous and ashamed. He could not call them crackpots, and it was not that he disagreed with their ideas. He admired the cleverness of those who avoided the draft by whatever dodge; he was a willing audience to their brags. He contributed always to the Community Chest and War Aid Funds (when he had the money). It was just that he felt that pacifists and such menaced the streets with their nakedness; he was embarrassed because of, not for, them.

"And a judge in Baltimore gives a welder five years for slugging a weld."

Jordan didn't see what that had to do with anything. He had always been mystified by the Law, but platonically he thought that Justice lay behind the strange configurations that he saw. He felt very uncomfortable, and went back to work.

He was first out to the car in the morning, Jerry was next. As she got in she accidentally banged him across the bridge of his nose with her lunchbox.

"Oh Jordy," she said, "I'm sorry. Does it hurt?"

She kissed it, a little more than playfully, and held his head on her shoulder till another rider appeared. Before he went home to bed, he had some of his landlady's tough hotcakes. He paid her for two meals a day, and usually ate breakfast, but half the time he didn't eat dinner. His nose throbbed, but even more than the throb he was conscious of the feel of Jerry's lips. He was too disturbed to go to sleep at once.

He awoke to the sound effects of some gangster program for children, after school and before supper, coming from a neighboring window. It was five-thirty and he could not bear to stay in bed. He got up and dressed in an old suit without a tie. He went down to the corner of Seventh and Broadway in Oakland and had three or four whisky and Seven-Up highballs. Then he had a turkey sandwich. He stood on the corner by a dime-a-dance joint for a while listening to the music, and went over and looked at the illustrations of the girls in front of the burlesque house for a while. Then he bought a coconut candy bar, all they had, in a drug-store, and ate it. He saw a flanger's helper he knew go by with a sailor. He started to say hello, but decided against it. Then he went home and shaved and played the radio till it was time for the car to come by.

They got to work half an hour early, as usual. Only Cliff cared about this: he had a girl at the University in Berkeley. For the rest of them the shipyard was a more social place than home. Yet they were always anxious and furious to get out of the parking lot ahead of the traffic in the morning.

A miasma of welding dust and mist hung over Hull Eight where Jordan was to work. The noise abated for the shift-change as he stood in the craneway and watched the swing-shifters come off the ships and wash up: only some chipper forgot his approaching freedom and clanged in the quiet. Jerry was to be on Hull Eight tonight. She got work tacking for a lazy flanger in Hold Six, just forward of the engine room. Jordan helped her get her line down into the hold and arranged to meet her for lunch on the staging up under third deck, back of the port fresh water tank.

He spent the early part of the morning planning to kiss her when he met her at lunch; he stood watching a pipe burner at work for over an hour before lunch, thinking of how he would touch her and where, what she would feel like, what they would say. But there was a fat man sitting a few yards away facing them when he got there. He had it all planned: he would run his right hand down her back a little way under her collar and kiss her as long and hard as she let him. As it was she was chewing when he arrived.

"Hiya, Jordy," she said. "We got company."

The fat man wasn't looking at them in particular, he looked as if he might even slump into sleep.

"How's your nose, honey child?" she said and rubbed it with her fingertips. At the warm caress of her fingers his scrotum tightened and he felt dizzy.

Jordan was not eating his box-lunch. He suddenly surprised them both by saying, "How'd you like company for breakfast, Jerry?"

"Well," she said slowly, looking at his hand, which he abruptly moved to cover hers, "Well, if you can stand oats and bacon, I guess so. I don't know though."

"Are you tired tonight, Jerry?" he said, with his heart so high he could hardly speak.

"Ain't done a *damn* thing."

"What time shall I come?"

"Well, maybe nine o'clock. Fred'll be gone to work and Tommy'll be at school. I don't think you'd ought to come when Tommy's there, Jordy. Do you?"

When at nine he mounted the dusty stairs to Jerry's flat, he felt a surge of confidence such that he kissed Jerry at the door before he looked behind her. No one else was there, and she was in a flowered print dress that showed off her pleasant figure well. Jordan had never seen her out of leathers before. He ran his hands over her body as if he had never felt flesh before, and so aroused them both that when he began to unbutton her dress in back, she said, "Don't you want to eat, Jordy?" and he shut her up with a kiss.

"Have you got anything, honey?" she whispered to him.

"No, haven't you?" he asked with alarm.

"Sure, honey, but you'll just have to wait a while." She went off to the bathroom.

She returned in a robe, which he took off her. She pulled the wall bed down while he undressed himself. Then they made love.

"By God, but you're a *fast* man," said Jerry and laughed hard. They waited a while and tried again, but Jordan did not satisfy her.

He looked unhappy at first, but when Jerry got up she said quietly, "That's all right, Jordy. Better luck next time." And kissed him gently as he lay on the bed.

After a while, she said, "Jordy, you're one of the sweetest men I *ever* knew, but you just don't talk enough. What's the matter, do I scare you?"

He only laughed and said no, and she went back to cooking.

They had oatmeal and bacon and toast for breakfast, and Jordan went home swinging his arms high. He paced around the room when he got in, and nearly smiled at himself in the mirror. For the first time in his life he felt taller than his mantelpiece.

Jordan is walking down a sidestreet in Oakland, going more and more slowly as he approaches the doctor's house. The houses are tall, flat and rococo, dusty beyond paint; the doctor's house he can see is brown, there are squares of cardboard stuck in some of the broken windows to keep out the wind, there are no steps but the front door opens directly onto the sidewalk. He walks by the house without looking at it; he has no appointment; it is late, but the doctor is always in. He knows he has to go in or he will be picked up by the FBI as a public menace. His disease seems to have something to do with his nose. He drags back and forces himself to ring the bell. The door swings in of its own volition. Jordan is very grateful for this thoughtfulness, it makes him feel welcome and important. He steps in and removes his hat.

A gangplank leads upward, toward the right, a long way. The gangplank leads to a high brilliant place. Jordan walks in exultation up the gangplank. A sign at the top of the gangplank reads "Anyone Found Urinating Will Be Immediately Discharged." An arched opening about three times the size of a lightening hole discloses a clean hallway with many doors and a brown linoleum floor. A welder's stinger hangs down to face level in the center of the opening. The doors have no handles, only a button to press. He turns right; the doors are numbered con-

secutively, beginning at fifteen. He goes reluctantly up the numbers. Between thirty-seven and thirty-eight there is a small opening like a laundry chute that has a sign "Go In Here." Jordan steps through, and finds himself in a small room with two hospital beds. On one is a dark-haired girl with long upcurling eyelashes; she greets him with a slow smile and nods to the other bed. He undresses and puts on a doe-skin bathrobe, and lies in the bed waiting for the doctor. The room has no roof, the stars are clear and close, the girl has fallen asleep apparently.

He nearly dozes off for a little while.

He is startled by a nurse coming through the access hole. He is sitting on a stool with the soft leather bathrobe about him. She stands about fifteen feet from him and holds out her arms with her head a little to one side. He arises and holds out his, but his hands are deformed with boxing gloves. He looks about and sees that he is in one corner of a fighting ring. The nurse with her arms out is the Red Cross mother; she does not move. But he does not approach her, he looks about, the stars are as many as before but much farther away, or else the walls are higher, about him through the lightening holes he sees three huge wedges of spectators pointed toward him. The center is largest, it is entirely men, the two flanking wedges of spectators are of ambiguous sex. All the faces have thin foreheads and huge broad noses, lack eyebrows, have wide jowls and are unsmiling. The Red Cross mother looks at him from her sad eyes, she has withdrawn to the farthest corner from him, her arms hang despondently. The spectators make no sound, but Jordan begins to realize that, from what he can see of them, the center section is rising up and down slowly like the piston of a huge engine and the outer sections are going down as the center goes up, and up as it goes down; but their movement becomes blurred to him and the outer sections seem to be merging into the center and all the individuals become sexless. The piston-like stroke becomes much stronger then and the front individual of all begins to assume individuality and seems about to leap toward Jordan. The trapezoid of this back-tilted face does not change expression.

Jordan runs shaking his head in spasms like a horse, he presses against the Red Cross mother who looks older now, she is standing on a stool or somehow is much taller than he, he buries his head between her breasts, his hands still wear the boxing gloves so that they slip when he tries to hug her, her breasts seemingly of their own volition cover his ears so that he hears nothing but his own throbbing. When he looks up she is silently laughing at him, he tries to hug her but his boxing-gloves slip, she laughs *harder and harder and then puts her right thumb on the bridge of his nose and shoves him so that he falls to the mat of the ring. He gets up to go to her again but she hits his nose so hard that it is half torn off. She turns away from him and disappears leaving only an echoless laugh for him where he lies on the mat with his gloves like paws over his head. All he dares look at is the patch of stars that seem to be infinitely free; for the rest his senses register nothing at all, he is warm, moist, still, there are no noises and it is dark, and he is possessed by utter utter terror.*

It was dark when he awoke, and only the distant mumble of movement and machines reminded him of the city about. He had slept long if not soundly, and now he felt well. He dressed and shaved, and ate an orange, leaning over the waste basket to catch the drippings. He was not hungry enough to go out, so he half smoothed out the covers to lie on the bed again. He left the window open and the bare light on over his bureau.

Bored as an invalid he looked for irregularities in the flowers on the wall paper. He decided to put a picture over the dark quadrangle on the wall over the head of his bed where another picture had hung. The land breeze of evening brought him the Emeryville industrial stench. He thought of Jerry, and thought with what care he would make love to her tomorrow. He remembered being a little disappointed by her slack breasts, but the warmth that came over him when he saw her and talked to her, when the memory of the sound of her voice returned to him, was nearly love. His senses could not get over her loveliness.

A clang of the street-car reminded him of the warning bell on the whirley cranes. He thought of Cliff's question: "What's a shipyard all about?" A job; he shrugged his shoulders. He turned out the light and stood looking out the window through the back windows into other people's evenings. He didn't feel hungry yet, so he lay back down on the bed and gazed at the glimmers reflected in the tumbler of water on the stand by his bed, dozing nearly, uneasy, conscious of exhausting activity within his otherself, activity inexplicable and shore-bound and tireless like breakers in a sea of heaviest grey.

He met the Stutz at the usual time, and did not say much to Jerry but pressed her leg with his. He wondered why his affection was silent, unfriendly-seeming. They were assigned to different hulls too far apart to meet at lunch. Jordan didn't feel much like working: he checked the important foundations that had been welded since the night before, then leaned behind the starboard boiler against the bulkhead and carved figures out of the wax crayons he used to mark weld—blue, yellow, red, white, green.

He felt very tired. The long walk in from the parking lot every night, and especially the long stairway up the side of the hull, always made his heart pound and made his feet heavy as if he had just gotten out of water. He would usually warm up right away though, but tonight not. He began wondering if he were in love with Jerry: he had the symptoms, but he was afraid to get into it. He was as frightened of thinking about it as of talking to her of what he felt. He remembered his wife, and how his dizzy love for her had crept into a corner like an old woman and died of ugliness.

He caught a glimpse of his leaderman going through the access hole into Hold Seven. He hurried back out into the engine room and checked the tilting brackets under the third deck and the lifting pads under the generator flat.

By seven he was still lethargic. Cliff was already in the car.

"Build a lot of ships last night?" asked Cliff, and Jordan half-laughed.

Jerry came and sat by Jordan and smiled at him. She asked him how he felt, and the low and laughing acceptance in the tone of her voice, though he thought it was just that she asked, unfolded him like wine. He bathed when he got home, and then walked directly to Jerry's flat. Tommy her son had not left for nursery school yet.

"Hello, Tommy," said Jordan quietly.

Tommy looked up from his oatmeal, then looked disgusted and didn't say anything.

"Who's that man?" he asked Jerry.

"He's Jordy, a friend of mama's," she said.

"I wish he'd go away."

"It's not nice to talk like that, honey. He's a *friend* of ours."

Jordan felt very badly, and went into the living room to read the paper. He stared at the fake-Persian pattern of the rug and was aware of the dirty colors in it and of the two worn spots where the legs of the folding bed hit. He suddenly felt nearly moved to tears that Jerry shouldn't have nice rugs and a bedroom with a regular wood bed with head and foot boards. He felt so sorry for her that he forgot about Tommy till he heard Jerry send him off to school. She came in and kissed Jordan on the nose and patted his head.

"He's not friendly with strangers at first," she said. "You ought to have come later."

"I'll say. I ought to 've come a *lot* later. Uh-huh."

They both laughed and felt better.

"Bacon and eggs suit you, sir?" she asked.

"I'll say."

She had on the same dress, but didn't have on anything under it. While she was cooking he touched her and kissed her so that they were both aroused. "Come on, honey," he said; he did not talk much, he could not think of anything to say. She turned out the fire and he pulled down the wall bed and undressed. Then he kissed her and laid her on the bed. She was cold and he did not feel comfortable. They did not say a word. After a long while, long after he had ceased to have erotic feeling, she seemed to slump. He had gone too slow; he knew it. He kissed her on the mouth, but it was as if they were under water, cold and apart-feeling. He withdrew and began caressing her, roughly, grotesquely he felt, shouldered her belly as a dog shoulders carrion, licked her navel and felt repelled.

"Come on, honey," said Jerry, "let's go again."

This time too he left her unsatisfied.

They had bacon and eggs in complete separateness. He was aware, as they ate, of the sounds of her chewing. He finished first, and was on edge by the time she was through.

He got up and said goodbye and she said goodbye and looked at her feet. He went home but had such indigestion that he walked all the way to downtown Oakland and saw two double-features and a newsreel show. Then he rode a street-car home and dozed an hour or so on top of the bed with his clothes on.

Jordan as the homeward time approached on the third morning felt jittery and half-consciously decided not to go to Jerry today. His stomach wasn't feeling right—the meat in the box lunch he had eaten was vaguely green in spots and hadn't smelled good. He wanted a haircut. He was sleepy. Anyhow Jerry hadn't seemed very sorry to see him go yesterday morning. He would go to bed and sleep till four or five, get a haircut and go to a movie.

But he hurried to get to the car first after the whistle blew, and sat in the far rear corner where anyone approaching from the passenger walk could not easily see him. Jerry came shortly. She got in shaking her head like a pup coming out of water.

"Oh it's a long night," she said.

She burrowed the top of her head against Jordan's cheek, then she looked up at him expectantly.

"There's no law against kissing people good-morning, I guess," she said and kissed him. He did not respond, but watched her as if he expected her to try to trick him.

"Come on, honey, take a whiff. Snuggle up." She took his hand and put it up under her welding jacket onto her breast. "Love me?" she said like any woman, and like any man he said he did, and when he got home whistled as he bathed and shaved, and walked whistling like a happy man straight to her flat.

"What've we got for breakfast?" he asked as he entered.

"Bacon and eggs and honey, sir," she said.

Jerry was serving up Tommy's oatmeal. Tommy contemplated Jordan from his own table and chair, without a word or smile. Jordan patted Jerry's bottom—she had on only pajamas—but her buttocks tightened in rejection. Jordan immediately went into the other room, his stomach tensing. He had read the morning paper to the end before Jerry had Tommy packed off to nursery school. He couldn't have told a thing of what he'd read but at least he hadn't felt anything while he was waiting.

She knocked the paper out of his hand and curtsied. "Will you have breakfast first?" she said tightlipped like a maid, "or will you have this?" and she sprawled him out on the couch kissing him and stroking his jaw in mock passion. Her forgiveness was not sullen.

"Food, food," cried Jordan.

She popped up and curtsied. "Just as you say, sir."

They both laughed. "We sure get along fine," said Jerry; "We sure do," said he; they both wanted to mean it, but neither would look at what they had said.

During breakfast he thawed out again. By the time they were finished and Jerry looking into her coffeecup with a little smile on her lips, he went around to her, clutching her forearms and rubbing cheeks with her.

"Gee," he said in a voice as if he had a cold, "Gee, I need you, honey."

"Do you, Jordy? Why?"

"Because you're so pretty and I like your brown eyes."

"Come on, honey," he said and pulled her up abruptly.

"Wait a minute," said Jerry.

He was naked when she returned, and had the bed pulled down.

He took off her robe immediately and kissed her face and breasts and belly feverishly without saying a word. She moaned a little and averted her face when he began making love to her. He was anxious not to hurt her and not to go wrong. However, Jerry after a while seemed to slump and grow cold again. Just for a second Jordan felt guilty for this: he knew he had been too anxious. But he felt suddenly very brutal and detached from the two bodies. He stopped, and when Jerry turned her face to see why, he very calculatingly kissed her hard. Like an ironic anatomist he noted that her lips and tongue were somewhat viscid. He became conscious of every separate portion of his body that touched her. He deliberately wallowed in his awareness of this surgical putting together of flesh and flesh, and made the hard unkind gestures of sensuality without passion, as if they both were stupidly drunk. His sweat was growing cold, and she was inert. Without pause he then went on, knowing that she was unhappy and probably in pain.

He got up and dressed, and as he was lacing his shoes Jerry said in solemn-eyed bitterness, "God damn you, you don't even know when a person's ready." Her voice was flat. She rolled over and faced the wall away from him. He covered her with the counterpane before he left.

"I needed her and she wasn't there," he tried to tell himself, but the words became, "I needed her and I didn't know where she was."

He took three aspirin tablets before he went to bed.

Jordan is welding. He stops for a moment and throws back his hood, holding his stinger in his hand. A grey-haired bossy woman in a Mother Hubbard comes up to him and takes the stinger from him. "You've had more than you need already," she says. "Let's take it off." She pulls the either end of the short stinger apart from the main cable. "Watch." She shoves the either end into a light socket nearby. Immediately the stinger swells and stands up. "Here, you may take it," she says, and stands a little apart from him, watching. Just below the end of the stinger the cable swells out like a cobra, and grows pink. Two breasts appear on the swelling, small and upstanding like pictures of Balinese maidens in the National Geographic. Jordan begins to feel very amorous and starts to suck at one of the breasts. But the grey-haired woman pulls the either end out of the socket, and the stinger cable goes back to normal. "You had better go to the toilet," she says. He dutifully goes into the toilet; he discovers that the stinger has become much shorter and fatter and is *somehow very unpleasant. He immediately throws it into the toilet bowl and flushes it away without looking at it again. He is overwhelmed with horror to see blood on his hand, and awakens saying to himself, "What happened to it? Why did it come off?"*

Jordan lay in bed for an hour after he awoke, until his legs became so sweaty and his feet so cold that he decided to get up. It was only eleven in the morning. He dressed and walked toward the train stop. He felt numb but expectant, he didn't know or try to understand why. It was like intercourse: great activity far far remote from something dim inside his otherself, that would eventually reach a climax and crash him into emotion. Something was going to happen, something tremendous which that dim awareness inside his otherself wanted and feared beyond any experience. He was grey and abstract trying to keep that far awareness dim: he thought he just had a headache.

The train was disappearing as he arrived; he went on up to Telegraph Avenue and to his local Bank of America. He withdrew all but a hundred dollars from his savings account—six hundred and fifty dollars in all. He took the next train to San Francisco and then took a bus to Bay Meadows. He got there at the end of the fifth race. He bet one hundred dollars on Quickly, a fifteen to one shot, to win. Quickly showed. Jordan and a man in a grey shirt set each other up to drinks. Jordan bet one hundred dollars on number five, without bothering to look at his name or the odds, or even bothering to watch the race. The horse ran fifth. The man in the grey shirt was still at the bar after the race. He was downcast: he had lost all his money. He advised Jordan to bet on number three, a sure bet. Jordan put three hundred dollars on number three to win. It placed. Jordan and the man in the grey shirt talked mournfully about luck and horses. In the last race he bet seventy-five dollars on Shortstop the favorite to win and seventy-five dollars to place. Shortstop showed.

Jordan couldn't find the man in the grey shirt, so he took the buses and trains back to Oakland. He went to his room and got five dollars out of the drawer where he kept emergency money, and drank beer till midnight in a bar on San Pablo Avenue. There wasn't anyone to talk to but the bartender, and the bartender had a woman at the other end of the bar whom he was laughing with. Once in a while other people would come in and have a drink and go out. The only reason Jordan stayed was that all the other bars near by had pink and blue neon lights, which he hated. He mourned home, drunk, and slept off and on till eight in the morning on top of the bed with his clothes on.

A strong one of the outlaw horde of urges which had built their own ghetto within him, whence they emerged only in disguise, appeared in the drab of a wish to walk in the fog across the Golden Gate Bridge. He thereupon took the train to San Francisco and at the terminal took a street-car out to Fisherman's Wharf. He had a beer in a bar and ate a whole bowl of oyster crackers; he had forgotten to eat for two days. When the bartender scowled at him and grabbed the bowl, he got up and went out. He thought he was close to the approach to the Golden Gate Bridge but he had to walk dozens of blocks to get there. He walked steadily up the ramp and out on to the Bridge.

When he was in the center of the Bridge he stopped and leaned on the rail; he turned up his collar to the breeze, and fumbled in his pockets. He found a piece of paper in his wallet, which he looked at without reading and then put on the rail. Tears of sorrow (but for what?) came to his eyes. He got on the rail and jumped, knocking the wallet over with him as he went. The wind tossed him over and over as he fell, and the shock of hitting the water broke his back. He was nearly insensate when he lit, but the pain of the blow registered as a heatless white sear which became the universe and himself. The tide was coming in; it carried him past the south side of Alcatraz, so close to the island that a guard might have spotted him. Then the current that turns south from Treasure Island caught him and he was carried all that night through the warships at anchor in the Bay. The next incoming tide carried him to the Alameda side and up the estuary a way, where he was caught in an old unused culvert, on the decayed shore opposite Siberia, the shore at which he and Cliff had looked a few days before. He had lain there ten days, his coat caught on a shard so that he did not float out again, before a couple of boys in a little sailboat found him. They tied a rope onto his right arm, in order to tow him to San Francisco; they could say they had found him along the San Francisco waterfront and get ten dollars' reward. However, his arm nearly came off at the shoulder when they began to tug him, so they tossed to see which of them would stay and watch, and which go get a cop and the five dollars' reward from the city.

The men from the morgue looked in his pockets and finding no identification, photographed him and gave him a number for the file; then they hauled him to the graveyard, put him in a pine box and buried him.

THE IMMORTAL JUD

by H. H. Riddleberger

"Do you realize that your Uncle Jud's achieved a kind of immortality around Oryton?" Doc Pete squinted down his long, thin nose and chuckled at my puzzlement. He had picked me up one fall morning as I was walking from my farm to town. We'd jogged along, cussing crops and the weather, and just naturally got to talking of Uncle Jud. Everybody does, in these parts, sooner or later.

"Immortality's a pretty strong word," I said doubtfully, thinking of angels and the Reverend Tassel—both a far cry from my Uncle Jud. Doc ticked a fly off Bessie's back and took off his hat to rub the top of his bald head before he answered.

"The dictionary says that immortality is 'unending existence or fame.' You needn't scoff," he looked at me severely. "There've been lots worse rascals than your Uncle Jud been thought immortal for less. He's been dead five years now and folks still think of him. Your Uncle Jud's a full-grown legend, son; what summer tourist folks call 'local color.' "

I got to thinking later of what he said, and how it happened that Uncle Jud had got to be "immortal." I remembered that the day he dragged back from Doc Pete's office with his bad news he didn't look immortal—he just looked human. Doc Pete had told him he'd have to take it easy from then on. Sit on the porch and never stir, and take his medicine three times a day. Why, Uncle Jud had never set a minute more'n he had to. He'd even given up going to church on Sunday because he couldn't bear to set that long.

He'd always been either going or coming from somewheres. I remember once when Uncle Jud was plowing twenty miles away on Fitz's place, and Pap and me were working the farm alone near Oryton. I was setting fence posts one morning late, when Uncle Jud came stomping over the hill, one of his black cigars in his mouth, and his left arm twisted around with a red and orange kerchief.

"Clint!" he was yelling at my father. "Clint! Git out that whiskey bottle and a knife. I bin bit by a strummer!" He always called a rattlesnake a "strummer," said they reminded him of banjos playing.

Pap fixed up his snake bite and they had a couple together, just to make sure the poison wasn't catching, and Pap tried to get my Uncle Jud to lie down. Uncle Jud refused, saying he'd left his mules hitched to the plow and standing in Fitz's field.

It wasn't more than four or five hours later, I heard him coming again. He wasn't making so much noise this time, so I let out a yell that brought Pap down from the hay loft. My Uncle Jud rounded the flagstone path and saw us standing there and stopped stock still. I can still smell the black cigars he always smoked, rancid and strong; he used to claim they had Spanish horsehair in them to make them draw.

"I plumb forgot, Clint," he said to my father, just like he'd only been there a moment ago. "I was just taking ahold of them wall-eyes' reins, when I remembered I plumb forgot to thank ye for the kindness of yore whiskey and yore care."

And that was all. He turned and went back again. Next time he saw Pap he said he finished his plowing along about midnight. "Nothin' unusual about it. I like to plow by moonlight. Easier to keep the furrows straight, and the mules don't get so plagued by sweat and flies."

That was the kind of man my uncle was. You can understand why he was a hero to us kids. He stood at least six feet three in stockings, with a thatch of red hair stuck straight out on top. I saw him stun a full grown Guernsey bull with his bare fist once. And watched him put a whittled splint onto a chicken's leg without the darned bird squawking even once. That was his nature—strong as a horse and gentle as a newborn baby colt.

It was a hard day, you can see it was, when he got told he had to quit his ways—quit hunting in the mornings on the hill, quit going anywhere he had a mind to, quit smoking and quit arguing—just set. Set quiet, for the rest of his born days.

Not that he paid any attention to it at first. The more Doc Pete would argue, the more he'd do. Pap made him come to live with us at Oryton, but that's all we could do. We couldn't keep a watch on Uncle Jud, with all our chores to do. So when we'd get back in the evening with haying or fencing or plowing done behind us, the calves would all be fed, the cows be in and milked and out again, and supper'd be hot and waiting on the stove. Pap'd rise up in wrath and talk right colorful for a younger brother.

"Aw, Clint," Uncle Jud would say, and get all red behind the ears like a kid, "a man just can't set down and stay there all day long. I druther die working somewheres, anyhow, than setting and waiting for it to come creeping up. Besides, my heart has lasted me till now, I guess it'll last me till the day I die." And then he'd promise to do better if it would make Pap quit worrying, and that would be the end of it. For that time.

He did improve some, too, except for one thing, and that was when he had to visit Doc Pete in town. Oryton lies seven miles east of the farm, and Uncle Jud would want to walk it every time he went. He had a lot of tricky ways of getting around all Pap's objections, too. Pap used to get up early and hitch up the rig and lead old sleepy Hunk to the back door, only to find that Uncle Jud had left a good half hour before. Or Uncle Jud would say on Tuesday morning that he'd go on Thursday, and then on Wednesday night he'd be waiting, full of beans and grinning like a fed dog, ready to tell us all the news he'd gathered while in town.

Pap used to get so mad he couldn't swallow. "Least you might think about the boy," he'd say. "How do you suppose he's gonna feel, coming across your mangy, flap-eared bones some evening? You're sure one fine example of the way a good upstanding, God-fearing dad-blasted old hypocrite should act!" Uncle Jud would look real sorry, but he'd never make a promise, not about this. I knew he wasn't ever going to, either, by the way his eyes were twinkling at me all the time he was acting apologetic.

Things went on like this for a long time—Pap jawing at Uncle Jud, and Uncle Jud going right on doing whatever he wanted to do, and looking sorry between times. Until one late afternoon when I was patching the shed roof, Uncle Jud called me down off the shingles. When I'd climbed down, I saw he was holding his medicine bottle hidden in his hand. He looked around shakily, as if to see was Pap nearby, so I knew what he was planning to do, and grinned.

"Going to town to Doc Pete's, Uncle Jud?"

He jumped like he'd been stung. "What's the matter with you, boy?" he said, making his voice sound honest. "You know I told your Pap at breakfast I wasn't going afore tomorrow noon. You act like you're plumb loco!"

"Aw, Uncle Jud," I argued, feeling peeved because he didn't trust me, "I know you better'n that. But shucks, I won't say anything. A man's got to get himself to town once in a while, I guess!" I said that loud; it sounded better that way, as if I were a grown man like he was. Besides, I knew Pap wasn't within hearing, but up at the east pasture putting out salt.

Uncle Jud cleared his throat, and his eyes twinkled like they always did when he had a secret with me. "Sure, boy," he said, "us men got to stick together. Your Pap's a good one, but he's got his troubles. He just don't understand. So put it there!"

I can tell you I felt pretty biggety, shaking hands with a man like Uncle Jud. I can still remember that handshake. It was more important to me than my first pair of my own britches. Uncle Jud's hand was hard and calloused and wrinkled. I guess it could have taken four of mine inside it all at once and crunched them up. But my Uncle's grip was just as soft as a calf's tongue.

"I want you to do me something, boy," he said after a minute and looked at the medicine bottle. "I'm kinda on the short side when it comes to dealing with this Doc Pete. I've been putting three teeny drips of this stuff in my stomach every day for over six months now. But I don't feel easy taking it without I know what's in it. For all I know, there might be something there I haven't got a taste for!"

"Shucks, Uncle Jud, you'd know it by now!" I said.

"Not necessarily. Last time I went to town I told Doc Pete I wasn't gonna take no more until he found it fit to tell me what it is. He rared up and hollered it 'wasn't ethical.' But he decided that he'd have to tell me." Uncle Jud shook his head. "Even then, the old cuss had to do it the hardest way. Took him a pencil and writ it on the bottle! Said if I could read it, I could know!" My Uncle squinted at the medicine, shoved it suddenly into my hands, and took out one of the big black cigars he still smoked when he was embarrassed. "Boy," he mumbled, "I'd kinda take it as a favor if you'd just wrap your tongue around them words. My eyesight's getting kinda dusty, lately."

I knew his eyesight wasn't getting dusty because the day before he'd spotted a chuck from the veranda that was a couple of miles off, and took me five minutes steady looking to locate. I knew it was just that Uncle Jud couldn't read. Of course, I didn't say anything. Just took the bottle and squinted at it good.

At first the writing didn't make sense. Then I began to make out the words "spirits of" and all of a sudden all three words came clear. But I had to read it to myself two or three times before I could believe I wasn't making a mistake. Then I read it out loud. My Uncle Jud had been taking nitro-glycerin—three drops a day for six months—half a year! And "spirits" of it, at that! I knew what spirits meant all right, from having smelled spirits of ammonia; it meant "strong." I swallowed hard and sneaked a look at him.

Uncle Jud was so sick-faced and white, I thought he'd have a spell. But I was still so scared and surprised and full of wonder, I couldn't make a motion.

"How much nitro-glycerin does that mean I got in me?" he asked in a weak, thin voice that didn't sound like his.

I summed up in my head as quick as I could.

"I guess it must be nearly half a pint," I answered. It sure seemed an awful lot of high-powered explosive to be carrying around in ignorance in your insides. It must have seemed that way to Uncle Jud, too, because all of a sudden he started to shake.

"Boy!" he whispered, holding his body stiffly and being careful not to jar himself, "boy, take this cigar outta my hand. Fast, before a terrible tragedy happens!"

I reached right over quickly, you can bet. I grabbed that black cigar and ground it down into the yellow dirt like a poison snake. Then I took hold of Uncle Jud's right arm and started in to ease him towards the house. He kept his back straight and head up, putting his feet down careful as a cat. Once he almost stumbled in a rut.

"Easy, boy!" he whispered urgently, but not as if he were mad. "This stuff has got to be treated with reverence and awe."

I finally got him up onto the porch, and in his favorite chair, which up to then hadn't been much used. He rested his arms in his lap and took a deep breath.

I was scared and had a right to be. There was my Uncle Jud with all that nitro-glycerin inside him, likely to go off any minute if a spark should get too near him, or if he got overheated, say, or jarred himself. And here were we, living in the same house and likely to be taken along with him in case of accident. It was the kind of thinking makes a fellow grow up real sudden-like.

I crept down off the porch, being mighty careful not to shake it any more than I had to with the floor as rotten as it was, and ran as fast as a boy's young legs can carry him to the east pasture. Pap heard about half my story and then took off and bettered my time by thirty seconds. He hit the shaky porch on the dead run, and Uncle Jud let out a screech and whistle that would have scared a buzzard.

"Blast it, slow up, Clint! You're risking forty acres and your house, not to include your only son and me, arriving here that way!" Then he remembered he had to be quiet himself and settled back into his chair again. "There's gonna have to be some amendments in the habits of living around here."

"Now, Jud, you take it easy," Pap told him, breathing hard, but quiet and reproving, "and tell me what's the matter. The boy here couldn't hardly talk. I couldn't make a bit of sense from him."

Uncle Jud calmed way down then, and told Pap what had happened. He made me show the writing on the bottle, and Pap said I'd read right. When Uncle Jud was finished, Pap shook his head. I could tell he was worried, though he didn't say so.

"Doc Pete's a reasonable man, even if he is educated. Don't make sense he'd give you anything that'd be dangerous. If he had, he'd have told you about it before."

"Didn't he try to keep me from knowing about it?" Uncle Jud tried to stay quiet, but he was boiling over. "Didn't he keep it hid from me for six months until I got smart and asked him what it was?"

Pap got mad then, and told my Uncle Jud that either he'd go on taking the medicine or he'd have to leave his house. Uncle Jud had started to get up before he remembered he wasn't in any position to do any undue moving around. He settled back and agreed, providing Pap would get Doc Pete to visit him right away. So Pap sent me in the rig.

All the way to town I kept on thinking. I didn't know if Pap was right, or who. But it didn't stand to reason a man could take a half-pint of nitro-glycerin in his insides and not be a likely candidate for trouble.

Doc Pete almost had a conniption fit when I told him why Pap wanted him at the farm. He wiped his face with his handkerchief and spit a couple of times before he could get enough dry breath to speak with.

"You tell that old potato-head that he can take that medicine or he can leave it! I've done all I can. If he doesn't like what I prescribe for him, tell him he can mix his own! Wait a minute!" Doc Pete stopped short and looked real hard at me. He made a quick grab for his hat and bag. "I've changed my mind. I'll tell the old windbag myself. For twenty years I've just been waiting for a chance like this!"

For a cob-legged man, Doc Pete could walk almighty fast. He almost beat me getting to the rig, but as he was putting his foot up to get in, he stopped and looked at me. Old Hunk stomped once or twice to hint we were wasting time. Doc Pete just stood there, kind of absent-minded, as if he hadn't ever gotten mad. He shook himself all over like a puppy that's found a hopfrog, and stepped back to the sidewalk.

"No," he said, half to himself and half to me, "No, I'll be darned if I will." He came around to my side of the rig and took my hand. "Now listen: I want you to tell this to your Uncle Jud. It's for his own good. You're interested in that, aren't you, Cal?"

"Yes sir!" I said, meaning it all I could.

"You tell him that he's right, and your Pap's all wrong. That medicine he took is almost pure, one-hundred per cent nitro-glycerin. It's the only thing in the world would keep a man alive as tough as your Uncle Jud is, and as sick. Tell him he's got to go on taking it, and he's got to be mighty careful of accidents. Remind him that I've been telling him to be quiet and to stop smoking. I'm not coming out to visit him now, because it'll just waste my time and his. Have you got it straight, son?"

I told him yes, I had, and thanked him. And once old Hunk was turned and headed right, I shouted and stomped for all I was worth on the floorboard, and kept Hunk going at a dead run all seven miles to home.

Pap and my Uncle Jud were setting right in the same positions as I'd left them. I spilled my story as fast as I could talk, being almost as winded as if I'd run home on my own legs all the way. But at least Uncle Jud was safe, and when I'd finished he settled himself like a basket of eggs on his chair, and looked at his paunch with wonder and respect.

Pap didn't seem convinced, but he said he was. "I guess Doc had his reasons for not telling you before," he pointed out to Uncle Jud, "and we'd do well to take his advice as it stands. If Doc says you've got enough explosive in you to make you a public menace, that's good enough. Maybe now you'll rest easy once in a while."

Uncle Jud nodded kind of dazed, and asked me gently if I'd please throw out all the cigars he had stored in the house so he wouldn't have to see them any more. I said I would, but I didn't move just then. I was busy thinking. I'd just been watching Pap when he was talking, and noticed his eyes were twinkling like Uncle Jud's used to twinkle when he was fooling. It made a fellow wonder if maybe Pap—but shucks! I'd heard Doc Pete say it myself, so it had to be true!

That was the beginning of a new peacefulness at our place. Uncle Jud wasn't troubled about a thing, and didn't fret us once from dawn to dawn. Matter of fact, there were a couple of things I always thought he could have done, without putting himself or us in any danger, like fetching a glass of water or an apple. But maybe it was just as well that he was over-careful about how he moved around. I used to wake up nights in a cold sweat thinking about what was likely to happen if he was under-careful just once. I hate to think what Uncle Jud's nights must have been.

But on the whole, my Uncle Jud got just as big a kick out of life as he had when he'd been able to run around however he wanted. He could still be pretty cantankerous on occasion, like the time Doc Pete wanted to get him in to town to have an "electro-cardiograph" test taken.

Uncle Jud wouldn't have any part of it. "Suppose the dang thing was to backfire, ha? Suppose it short-circuited and sparked? Then where'd I be? I got a lot of friends in that town, Doc, and I don't want to give them any cause to remember me with hard feelings."

Doc Pete sighed and mopped his head and argued. "How'm I supposed to find out how you are? I got to run tests, Jud. I'm not a witch!"

Uncle Jud closed his eyes and shook his head and acted like an early Christian martyr. "If it's so deep inside me you can't find it with that double telephone you carry around, then it's too deep to do me any harm. Besides, I ain't going to have any electric spark fandangle near me, and that's my final word!"

Most everybody near Oryton began to hear about the nitro-glycerin in Uncle Jud's system and paid him a visit. The more they visited, the more the stories told about him grew, stories I knew weren't true. And yet each one had just enough of Uncle Jud in it to make it sound as if it could have happened. Folks got hold of incidents, like the time he told the Doc he wouldn't go to town for fear of blowing up his friends, and they liked that. It made them feel they owed him thanks or something, since he'd gone into hibernation for their sakes. It wasn't long before even the worst old die-hard had forgotten the mischief that Uncle Jud had caused ever since he was a kid. Jim Breen came visiting one day and told my Pa he'd torn up the bill he'd always hoped to serve to Jud some day—the one that charged him for the barn he'd burned. The feeling of the people around Oryton got to be just like they owned a part of Uncle Jud; as if in some way he was "family," and they took to paying regular monthly visits.

There was a set routine for visitors to go through. Uncle Jud had me put a big tin sign up at the gate with a milk can underneath. The sign warned folks to put out all their smokes and drop them in the can, and asked them please to walk in carefully, talk in lowered voices, and not to start any arguments. So by the time a family come through the gate, they were usually meek as kittens and twice as humble. It was worth being in constant danger near Uncle Jud to watch the town wiseacres and the toughs come creeping up the path, scared out of time they'd tread too heavy, or sneeze, and blow themselves into their just reward. Which for most of them wasn't pleasant to think about.

My Uncle Jud lived to be eighty-two. He kept track of the quantity of nitro-glycerin he'd swallowed, right up to the end. The day before he died, I came across him in the dining room taking his nightly dose. When he put the spoon down, he smiled proudly at me.

"I bet that's some kind of world's record, son," he said. "That makes six quarts, one pint of nitro-glycerin I've got tucked safe away. I tell you what, I could make one whale of an explosion if I felt like it!"

Not only had he never "felt like it," he'd used the empty hours between folks' visits thinking up ways to make life safer, both for his friends and for himself. He'd got in the habit of taking a bath three times a day, instead of once a week, and if he was feeling especially good he'd even go for a wade in the creek. "Cooling off," he called it, to keep himself from getting overheated. He was mortally afraid of spontaneous combustion. He'd seen enough bad hay fires to know the danger that comes from wet stuffs packed too closely. So he'd spend half an hour after his bath, or after wading, drying himself off well to make extra sure it couldn't take place in him. And he'd keep his bathing periods short so that too much unwanted moisture couldn't seep in.

His fanciest contraption was a chain he hooked around his leg. It had been his Grandpap's watch chain in its day, but Uncle Jud gave out he "didn't mean no disrespect to it." One end of the chain was looped around his ankle, and the free end trailed behind him on the ground. First time Pap saw it, he thought Uncle Jud had dropped it by mistake and didn't want to bend down quite so far to pick it up. It was the only time I saw my Uncle Jud move fast in twenty years, but it made up for all the times he didn't. He skittered across the room and let go with one of his old-time fancy bellows.

"Leave that chain be! You want me to explode? That chain has gotta touch the ground always—wherever, whenever, and Sundays! That there's my ground connection, like a gas truck. Keeps my static electricity from sparking. Now, leave it be!"

The watch chain dragged and dangled unmolested behind Uncle Jud right into his grave.

The ricketier Uncle Jud got, the worrieder he'd become about accidentally jarring himself when he limped around. So Pap bought him a round, green-rubber pillow that got blown up like an automobile tire. My Uncle Jud was mighty proud of that pillow. It got so whenever Uncle Jud was setting, you'd know the old green pillow was underneath.

One rainy night in April a good hard freshet took out the dynamo down by the bridge and the lights went off. We had to light the candles in the house, and it was so cold and wet that Uncle Jud couldn't stay on the porch. All evening long, the candles sputtering and guttering, Uncle Jud got nervouser and nervouser. Along about ten o'clock, with the storm right overhead, it let out a clap of early thunder, the kind that comes so unexpected it's enough to fright a man no matter *how* healthy he is. Right at the same time, and probably because he jumped so hard, my Uncle Jud's air pillow blew its valve. We all thought he'd gone up in smoke for sure and he thought so too for a minute. The scare didn't seem to do him any harm, but during the night he passed away in his sleep, as peacefully as he had learned to pass away his days.

It was a mighty sad day for Oryton and us. The folks around wanted to have him buried with what Judge Croft called "public honors" and laid to rest in the biggest cemetery. But Uncle Jud, fearing that he'd explode if someone trod too heavy near his grave, had had a will made out, saying that when he died he'd like to lie "up in the wood lot on the little hill just east of Clinton's house." I sure was glad. You couldn't have found a place much prettier to be buried in, with sunlight coming through the trees and the sound of Pap's ten cows going lazy through the woods. It was a place I'd found when I was a kid, where you could smell the woodsmoke from the house and what was cooking on the stove for supper, or watch the road and listen to the creek.

I never saw so many people at once as gathered up there for my uncle's burial. Seems like they were coming for a day and a half before the services. And after it was over, they stayed around, setting in the yard or on the porch, leaving just one chair empty, and that was his. And talking about him. It felt good to see how many felt the same way as I did about my Uncle Jud.

That's what Doc Pete meant Thursday when he said that Uncle Jud had "achieved a kind of immortality." Maybe he's not immortal like they mean in fancy books, but I've been thinking.

All I know is his neighbors don't forget him. I don't suppose one of them's ever paid a visit to his grave up in the woods. But there's other ways, like when it's winter and folks get to gathering for sociables. You'll find that Uncle Jud is never missing from one of these for long. And maybe more important, in the spring, when thunderheads build up out on the hills, the folks look up from plowing or the chores, or set the new bread down and wipe their hands, or just quit whittling a second, listening and waiting. And when that first, clean thunder clap comes rolling down the valley, they nod their heads and say: "Hear It? That's summer come again. Always reminds me of Old Jud somehow, and the day he died. Say, remember the time he—"

THE WAR OF THE ROSES

by George Sturtevant

BERT sat deflatedly in the big wicker chair on the sun-brightened porch of the Good Health Hotel and spat over the rail every once in a while. Every once in a while he'd have a short and hit his shoe but it didn't bother him.

"You're a terrible shot," Alfred said the third time Bert hit his shoe. "Man spits on his shoe is a pretty damn poor shot. You wouldn't've lasted long on the front."

"What front?" Bert asked and spat again, missed his shoe, watched the ginder arch over the rail. "What the hell front you talking about?"

"It starts again," Alfred said disgustedly. "You're going to make fun again."

"I'm not making fun, Alfred. I'm just asking what front?"

"I told you yesterday. The European front. Germany, France, Belgium. I wonder how we stood it?"

"Stood what? What you talking about standing?"

"The war, damn it," Alfred said. "I was just wondering how we stood it and you got to go make fun."

Bert shook his head slowly, spat again, missed his foot again. "See there," he said. "I'm a good shot. Missed my shoe twice running. Twice spitting I mean. Now what the hell war you talking about? There's been lots of wars. Which one you talking about?"

"The War of the Roses," Alfred said irritably. "What the hell war would I be talking about? We've just finished the biggest, godawfulest war ever and you ask which war am I talking about. You're crazy, Bert."

"I'm crazy?" Bert asked, turning his head slowly to gaze at the party of the second part. "You're the one's crazy, talking about a war. Why don't you shut up on the war? You was quartermaster. What right you got talking about the war? You had a cinch."

"A war's a war," Alfred said. "The quartermaster was in the war too."

"But you ate good, Alfred. What you bitching about the war for?

What you talking about the front for? What front were you ever on?"

"We supplied the boys," Alfred said vaguely. "We took our chances."

"Sure you did. You took chances with the clap back in Liége. You never saw the front. You might as well been in Hackensack. Forget the goddam war. Look at that lake out there and forget the goddam war. If I wasn't so damn lazy I'd swim in that lake."

"See!" Alfred said triumphantly. "You're tired of the war too. You don't want to talk about it because you're afraid to. It's on your nerves the same as it's on mine."

"Balls. I kind of liked the war. I never thought much about it when I was in it. Wouldn't think a damn thing about it now if people wasn't always talking about it. That's why I came up here. To get away from the barroom commandos."

"So you *liked* the war," Alfred said contemptuously. "You must've been in the air corps. They were the only ones that liked the war."

"No air corps for me," Bert said. "I was just in the army and I didn't mind being in the army. What I do mind is the barroom commandos. What a bunch. I already met fifty thousand troops who were at Bastogne and they all knocked out two tanks the day before Christmas. Just the ones I met knocked out one hundred thousand tanks the day before Christmas. A guy goes to a bar for a drink, not to hear those kind of statistics. So I came up here to get away from it. Then I meet you and there goes the war talk again. What is all this stuff? If you want to talk about war talk about the War of the Roses. That must have been a good war with no fifty thousand guys in barrooms knocking out tanks at Bastogne. Talk about the War of the Roses."

"I don't know anything about the War of the Roses," Alfred said. "I just read the name in a book once. What the hell would I know about the War of the Roses?"

"What the hell do you know about any war, Alfred? What the hell do you know about the one we just finished?"

"Nuts," Alfred said and got up and started off the porch. "I was just trying to make conversation and you got to give me all that crazy talk again. I'm going swimming."

"Do you good," Bert said. "Cool you off. Next thing I know you'd be telling me you were at Bastogne. A swim will do you good."

"Nuts," Alfred hollered back and he ran down the hill and jumped into the lake, forgetting to kick off his shoes.

He's loco, Bert thought. That rough duty at Liége gave him battle fatigue. What a goddam guy. Talking about the war.

A tall lanky kid in bathing trunks came up and plopped in the chair Alfred had vacated. "Boy! This is the life!" he said. "I dreamed about this for years. For three years this is all I dreamed about."

"You too?" Bert asked and his next ginder hit his shoe. "You got a complex too? I can see it coming." The kid was looking at him askance but Bert didn't care. "Go ahead, kid," he continued. "Tell me all about the tanks at Bastogne and how close they were when your bazooka hung fire and you blew 'em up with hand-grenades. Go ahead and tell me and get it off your chest."

"You're crazy," the kid said, inching his chair away from Bert's. "I never was at Bastogne. I was in the navy."

"And this place is all you dreamed about for three years?"

"That's right. We used to come up here all the time before the war. I've been looking forward to coming back for a long time."

"This is the only thing I didn't look forward to," Bert said. "I looked forward to drinking in bars and now I can't go to them no more. I was becoming too much of an expert on Bastogne."

"I don't know what you're talking about," the kid said. "I just wanted to say how good it is to be here and have it all over with. Is there anything wrong in feeling like that?"

"Sure it's wrong," Bert said, lighting a cigarette. "Just talking about it is wrong. It means you didn't take the war in stride. There's been lots of wars and we should be able to take 'em in stride without always talking about the one damn war we was in. You want to talk about a war talk about the War of the Roses. That's one war I wasn't in and I'd like to know about it."

"That was an English war, I think," the kid said and paused to be corrected because he wasn't too sure about it. "I think there were two different sides, both English, and they wore different kinds of roses to tell each other apart."

"Now that's fine. That's interesting. That sounds like a war worth knowing about. Wearing roses instead of uniforms and helmets. That's a nice flourish. That must have been a nice war."

"People got killed in that war," the kid said gravely.

"So what? It was so long ago they'd all be dead anyhow. What is all this fuss about people getting killed in wars? We all know it happens."

"It's not funny," the kid said a little angrily. "I've lost buddies and I don't like that kind of talk."

"I'm sorry," Bert said. "That wasn't a nice thing to say. But it's silly to me to make such a fuss over something we know happens. There's hardly been a war yet when somebody didn't get killed. It happens."

"I don't like that kind of talk," the kid said and he got up and left the porch.

He's crazy as a coot, Bert thought, he's crazy as hell but a nice kid with a good attitude about his buddies. And he wasn't at Bastogne. Nice kid.

Bert squirmed a bit while he reached around and pulled the seat of his pants loose from his buttocks. He settled back again in the chair and sent a beauty of a gob lobbing clear to the snowball bush. He saw the recreation director coming along the porch toward him. She was carrying a big armful of books and magazines and Bert said a dirty word and hoped she wouldn't stop. She stopped.

"My, my, Mister Grady, is that all you do? Sit in that chair all day?"

"I get up to eat and move my bowels once in a while."

Miss Burkmaster blushed but she was a brave young woman. "You should get more exercise," she said brightly. "You should take advantage of our recreational facilities."

"I go eat my meals and move my bowels twice a day," Bert said. "That's plenty of exercise."

"Would you like something to read?" she asked quickly. "I have a nice collection of books and magazines."

"You got a book on the War of the Roses?"

"I'm afraid not," she said and a glaze came over her eyes and she backed up a pace. "But I have the latest books and magazines."

"Don't want them," Bert said curtly. "I can guess at everything that's in them. There's bound to be two stories about guys knocking out tanks at Bastogne. One of the books is probably by a navy officer explaining what a hell of a rough war it was, what with officers sometimes having to wait twenty minutes for the orderly to mix the highballs. There's a short story in each of those magazines about how tough it is for Park Avenue officers coming home and trying to find a nice cozy duplex. Everybody's writing something about the war and publishing it except the guys what did the fighting. I don't want your goddam magazines. I know enough about Bastogne already."

"All right, Mister Grady, I'll be moving along now. If there's anything I can do for you let me know."

"You can go to hell," Bert said easily. "I think you're crazy."

Watching thin Miss Burkmaster tapping swiftly away he experienced a moment of contrition. But she's crazy, he thought, reading all that bunk in the magazines. He forgot about her.

A hulking young man with "U.S. Army" tattooed on his chest came along about fifteen minutes later and said, "My name's Davidson. Mind if I sit down?"

"It's a free country," Bert said, sizing up the tattoo on the big bronze chest. "My name's Bert and I don't care if you sit down or not. What theater were you in?"

"Europe."

"Were you at Bastogne?" He spat a big one clear out to the snowball bush, watched it catch on a branch and stretch elastically to the ground. "I suppose you were at Bastogne?"

"Yes, I was," Davidson said, his face brightening as he sensed a congenial conversation in the making. "That was a rough show."

"How many tanks did you get?"

"One. Another fellow and me got one between us."

"Only one?" Bert asked, disappointed. "Only one between two of you?"

"That's all," Davidson said. "I got a half a tank you might say."

"I might say anything," Bert said. "But I wouldn't say that. I never saw a half a tank. You got your half tank the day before Christmas, no doubt, in that big fight?"

"That's right," Davidson said uneasily. "Were you there too?"

"Me? No. I wasn't in this war." Bert looked at Davidson owlishly. "Only war I was ever in was the War of the Roses."

"See you later," Davidson said hastily. "I got to play tennis with Miss Burkmaster."

"Ask her has she gone to hell yet," Bert called after him. He settled down to enjoy himself alone and thought Davidson was the craziest guy he had talked to all day. Only half a tank at Bastogne. The man was a slacker. But he was unique too. He was fifty thousand and one on the list of people Bert had met who had been at Bastogne. No wonder the krauts couldn't take the town. Fifty thousand and one troops! And he hadn't met them all yet.

"Every war had one," Bert said when Alfred came back dripping wet and his temper cooled off. "I wonder which one it was in the War of the Roses."

"One what?" Alfred asked like he didn't care to know. "What the hell you talking about now?"

"The battle, of course. I mean the big battle, the one everybody was in. Everybody in America got a relative who was at Gettysburg in the Civil War. Everybody knows somebody who was at San Juan Hill in the Spanish one. In the World War it was the Argonne. I read some place that the Army says there were seven hundred thousand troops in the Argonne battle and I've met two million and ninety-three of them so far. In the last war it was Bastogne. I wonder what battle everybody was in in the War of the Roses?"

"You sit in the sun too long," Alfred said. "I'm going to go get your mother to make you take a rest."

Alfred went into the hotel and Bert sighed deeply and tried to spit again but his mouth was too dry. He leaned back in the chair and closed his eyes. After a few minutes he heard his mother coming and she was talking rapidly to Miss Burkmaster.

"Oh, there you are, Bertram," his mother called out. "Don't you think it's time you came in and had a nap?"

Bert opened his eyes and his father was there too.

"Hello, pop," he said to his father. "Tell Mom to go away and leave me alone."

"You better come in, son," his father said. "You should take a rest."

"He's been talking about Bastogne again," Alfred said. "And he's got a new one now. The War of the Roses."

"It sounds serious this time," his mother said. "Maybe we had better have the doctor."

"I'm all right," Bert said. "I'll go up and lie down, just so you leave me alone."

"He's psycho-neurotic," Mr. Grady whispered to Miss Burkmaster, as Bert shuffled away. "He tells everybody to go to hell. Don't mind it."

"I'm sorry," Miss Burkmaster said. "I didn't know. He seems all right."

"Oh, he's not violent," Mrs. Grady said. "He's just a *little* bit crazy. He never talks about anything but the war. He got a terrible shock at Bastogne and he never got right again."

"Day before Christmas it happened," Mr. Grady said proudly. "He knocked out two tanks from here to the snowball bush but it was so close it left his mind sort of funny. But he's not violent. Just sort of touchy about the war and mostly about Bastogne."

"I understand," Miss Burkmaster said.

Bert put his head back out through the door and hollered.

"You want something, Bertram?" his mother called. "Can we get you anything at all?"

"Yes," Bert said. "Go find a library and get me a book about the War of the Roses. That sounds like a nice war to know about and I want a book on it."

MY MOTHER WAS A LILAC

by Adrien Stoutenberg

There were no two people in the world more different. Old Spydel, as Dutch as a bean pot, even shaped like one with a round bottom and a clapper-cover of a head; and Danaher with eyes so green they crackled, and an Irish mouth like a seam burst open. Uncle Danaher and Grandpa Spydel: the names bristled at each other. Spydel flicked a sly, fat tongue. Danaher made the air shake with his fist. Spydel was a kind of ancient, quiet, stodgy, blunderbuss standing in the corner. The other went off like a rocket, spewing sparks and rattle-noises all over the house. There was scarcely a corridor between them where a third person could live. The air was used up.

"Spydel is a toad. Danaher's an adder." Young Therese knew it long before she said it. "I'm something in between that they war about. And all the time, I'm not there." That was the only triumphant part of it. She was not there to be fought over. They were dismembering a ghost. There was consolation in that, but it did not ease the *person*, the flesh-and-brain-bundle that stood in the line of fire. There was the visible creature that caught the cross-fire, and there was the invisible ghost that was far away and serene. Though, sometimes, even the ghost got mangled and crept off by itself awhile to bleed and understand its wounds. If they were really to kill the ghost, it would be finished. Then, she supposed, she could even caress the sleek black adder head—getting hair oil on her fingers—and pat the old man's pudgy hand that was like new bread out of the oven.

There was one refuge: the cellar. The cellar was hers. Hers and whatever fluttered and crawled there, and rotted there or turned brass-green with mildew. The air in the cellar was not used, and it was almost worse than the steam of air off Uncle Danaher's hot lungs, or the patient burble off Grandpa Spydel's full lips. It was air, not fresh, but old in a different way. Old from neglect, except for the tiny red bellows in a mouse's breast, or the snarl in a rat's throat. There was a small empty barrel there for a chair, and Therese sat on the barrel and wrote poetry. In the dim light from the one dust-charred window, she could watch her own hand moving over the page of the tablet like a white spider. The hand held a pencil and moved swiftly, for it would not do to be in the cellar too long. Danaher's long tongue would come swiveling down the steps, crying, "Reese, what're you doing down there?" Or Spydel's voice would come shuffling, "Say, girl, you going to be down there all day?"

The one thing she did not want was for Danaher to come down after her. The cellar was too close and pushed him against her. Or was it that he drew the cellar walls around him as an excuse for closeness? He was not her blood-uncle. He had wandered into the family through the oblique relationships of second marriages and in-laws and half-brothers. It was the same with Grandpa Spydel. The three lived together like a family, but there was no speck of blood between them. It had all been done by scattered legal processes—except for Grandma.

There was room in the cellar for tears, and she shed them there. It was what gave the place its dampness, she thought sometimes. It seemed even to her that there was something pathetic and sadly ridiculous for a girl almost a woman, almost sixteen, to be sitting in a cellar whimpering at the bottom of her throat, "Grandma . . . Grandma." Grandma had been the only creature in the world with a valve of kindred blood pumping her heart. The two who had made Therese were grave dust long ago. Grandma was still bones. Grandma rattled, a terrible sound in the wind. Except for that, Therese was alone. Her father and mother might as well have been Adam and Eve, so remote were they. All around her were the world's people with networks of kindred blood trickling from branch to branch down two, three, four generations, and she was nothing but her own. She was not, never could be, Spydel or Danaher. Their hands claimed her but their nerve-ends were far away, lashed round with alien skins, intruder's eyes. But they loved her. She trembled, seeking out a refuge for her trembling. There was a safe, nagging love. There was a love that wanted to grow over her like a vine, a hot suffocating vine that shut out the sun but enclosed all the sun's heat in its blind shade. He was thirty-five and she no longer trusted him.

"I wouldn't touch a hair of your head," he wept sometimes when he was drunk. "I wouldn't hurt your little finger. I been like a father to you, like I would have been to my own baby, Bunny, if she'd lived." The deluge of tears dripping over her hands; all but washing her feet with the tears and drying her feet with his short oily hair.

In the cellar twilight, her hand shoved the pencil deep into the tablet and spelled out the word, "outrage, outrage, outrage," over and over. Her mouth twitched with a pale humour as she wrote in capital letters: OUTRAGE. Title of a triolet. No, Uncle Danny Danaher, it is not like a quartet. It is one pain split three ways.

There was the smell of potato-rot and she wondered if the smell was poisonous like the carbon monoxide from a car. The black walls of the cellar breathed at her too. It was no place to be. Some day, she would come up out of the dark hole with sprouts growing from her head like the inquisitive yellow-green sprouts creeping out of the potatoes in the bushel basket. It would be a wonderful thing. It would frighten Danaher to silence. It would make Grandpa's blue-bean eyes bulge.

Grandpa was eighty, and young. He must not die. It would leave her alone with Danaher.

She came up out of the cellar, carrying a bunch of ruined carrots. The dampness blew out from her clothes and her hair. She went, timidly, to the pantry and began to scrape the carrots. She pretended that they were Danaher's fingers, long and stained orange from nicotine. She scraped each one carefully, and then, one slice after another, she cut them down, first the cuticle, then the middle joint, then the knuckle.

He came up behind her and tweaked her ear. She turned, the knife bleeding carrot juice down onto her wrist. His teeth were yellow too, she saw, and his eyes were as green as the carrot tops. He was laughing because he had surprised her to paleness. He had surprised her ghost.

"You're goin' to get the thrill of your life tomorrow," he said. There was a delirious pride in his voice. "Just wait till you see it comin' up to the back door in a truck, all paid for, cash and delivery. Say, I just want to be around to see your eyes swim when you see it."

"Tomorrow?" she said and the knife went limp. She had an impulse to put her arm around his neck and cry, "Oh, Uncle Danny, you're good to me." But he expected it too much, and if she did he would blubber in a hideously sad way and green tears of love would go trickling down his cheeks to mar the blue-white color of his chin. She had once seen a tear gleam on the diamond of his necktie pin and it had been hard to tell which was tear and which was jewel.

"It will be nice to have it," she said, turning back to the carrots. Her voice was as wilted as the leathery carrot tips. Danaher squeezed her capacity for words dry and the poetry went back into some dark subsoil like a root. She could never talk to him except as a mechanical doll pressed into warbling, "Ma-ma, Ma-ma."

"You've been dreamin' of having that piano, for years," he reminded her. "Even when you was a little kid hardly able to waddle you'd climb up on the stool of that old organ in the woodshed and you'd yell 'listen, I'm makin' music' and there wouldn't be a sound 'cause the mice had eaten out all the sound. I said then, Danny Danaher, the kid's got music in her and you're the guy who's goin' to see to it that she gets a chance to be what she wants. Or, even if it ain't music—whatever it is—I said this is the fellow," and he prodded his chest with a proud forefinger, "who'll see to it that she gets what she wants. It's a wonderful thing to have music in your heart, Reese. I'm a lover of music. It stirs my heart around like a spoon."

There, he was taking the poetry out of her mouth, spewing it on her like a taunt. He wouldn't stop until he had exhausted himself. He would stand over her, or pace around her, nudging her ribs, quoting himself, gesticulating, orating, plagiarizing her until he had made some ungodly counterfeit that looked real to himself. The piano was an offering but it was too much like giving a person a marvelous dagger and wanting some blood drops on the blade in return.

"Ain't you glad? Ain't you excited? Think how long you wanted it and now I've got it for you!"

"Yes, Ah. . . ." There, like a doll. Yes . . . ah, yes . . . ah. "It's awfully nice of you . . . Danaher." The word-roots squirmed and hid deeper for shame.

"Hell," he crowed, bursting with gratification over the dead words, "that's nothin' to what I'm goin' to do. Just you wait. My luck's strong. Wait till I get that new carnival line. You know, baby," he pushed his face in front of hers so that she could not avoid the mad dream of his eyes, "there's nothin' in this world I wouldn't do for you! If you was my own flesh and blood, I wouldn't do more."

"Yes," she said with a feeling of the cellar inside of her. "I'm his host," she thought and the carrot-water shuddered around her hands. From the rocking chair in the kitchen came Grandpa's strangled snores. The carrot slices plopped in the water while she chanted silently, "I hate him, I hate him not, I hate him, I hate him not." She could not think of the piano with him there.

The lilacs outside the window tossed a plume of fragrance through the screen and she felt giddy and wanted to run and leap down the throat of the blooms and swim forever, deeper and deeper, into the liquid purple of the flower's heart.

"I want to drown in nectar," she began to write on the tablet in her brain. "I want to drown in love as in a sea. . . ."

"Those bastards wanted to charge me extra for the bench. You should have heard me tell 'em off. I sez, I'm not payin' extra for any damned bench. You can keep the piano, I sez. There's plenty of other pianos. I don't have to buy no second-hand piano, I sez, but I want it for the kid to practice on until I get her a grand. That's right, Reese. Someday, we'll get a grand."

If the knife had wings it would fly at his throat just to stop the sobbing leech of his voice. It would fly up and cut off his wrist where his hand was stroking her hair. If only he didn't kiss her. But he wouldn't. That was for farewells and homecomings. Maybe that was why he went and came so often.

"Why didn't Bunny live?" she implored the lilacs. "Then I'd have been free. He'd have had somebody of his own!" The knife flew against her own fingers and left a blood mark. She tried to hide the blood but he saw it immediately and with a curse and a cry of concern rushed for the medicine drawer. She stood, numbly, waiting for him to come and bandage the cut, hearing Grandpa's snores stop and his old voice flutter, "What's the matter? What's the matter?"

The house creaked like a hammock going with the wind. The blood made her feel faint. Even the lilacs had mouths now, like lavender cannibals. "My mother was a lilac, my father was a thorn; they bred a tiger lily and left it to the storm."

"Here you are. Here!" Danaher came running.

Behind him came Grandpa, a blunderbuss sighting through each eye. "That ain't the way, Dan. Let me do it."

"I should cut off a hand for each," she thought, and leaned back against the cupboard, rocking with the hammock of the house.

BRING ON YOUR MIKE TWIN SULLIVANS

by Edward McSorley

IT WAS cosy there in the throne room. Sitting there Mr. Beggins could see everything, the side hallway that led to the offices and the dormitory upstairs, the wide door on the roller and he had the switches right at his hand for the lights both in the garage and the hallway. He had lashed the mousy plush seat from a car to the bowl itself, which no one ever remembered using, anyhow, and he had cut the chain away in case anyone should ever be tempted to. The room was comfortably wide and the steam pipes came up through the floor for about a foot and a half where they were broken with elbows and ran along the wall. Mr. Beggins had newspapers covering the pipes and over them he hung the chamois cloths that he used in polishing the ambulances and the hearses. He had decorated the walls as high as he could reach with newspaper clippings of pictures of the more elegant funerals serviced by the Burns-Scroog Funeral and Ambulance Service and he was mightily proud of them. There was a picture of the Packy Collins funeral at St. Ignatius in The Bronx showing the pallbearers carrying the two thousand dollar coffin containing what remained of Packy after the Meldoni mob in Lower Harlem finished puncturing Packy with, the police said, a variety of ice picks. Next to it there was a side view of the hearse in which Judge McPartland was being carried to eternal rest and under Packy was a very yellowed clipping of Sande booting home a winner. These were highest and in a straight row under them was an imposing row of News color-roto portraits, Mayor James J. Walker, Al Smith, Jack Dempsey, Tunney, Eamon De Valera, Pius XI, and an action shot of Mike McTigue and Siki taken at the St. Patrick's fight in Dublin. On the housing of the wooden flush box above, Mr. Beggins had a motto, copied in his own bold hand and taken from a sign in McSorley's ale house admonishing all to "Be Good, Or Be Gone." The motto was printed in fierce characters and the diagonal line in the "n" rose from the lower end of the left vertical up to and above the tip of the right vertical. On one side of the sign was a little Irish flag with the harp and Erin Go Bragh and the other side the Stars and Stripes. Both were silk. The more intimate, the more cherished pictures were on the wall at the left of Mr. Beggins when he sat on the throne so that he could point to them with his pipe in his hand when he was talking about them. Mr. Beggins was right handed, but oddly enough when he was pointing with his pipe in his hand it was always the left hand he used.

A cabinet photo of Joan was in the center of the wall. What a strange name for a Kerry woman, Mr. Beggins always thought, God rest her soul. But there was she in the middle of the wall, her hair drawn tight and flat from the part in the center, her sweet defiant nose uptilted and her deeply set blue eyes. Mr. Beggins had had two or three companies make color copies of the picture but none of them ever got the right blue in the eyes, so he didn't keep them. He bought them, of course, because you had to keep your word, especially you had to keep your word if you made a bargain with them sly narrowbacks that was in the picture business. But you'd think, wouldn't you think now, that, well, what with the wonders of the country and all, wouldn't you think they'd find the blue somewhere in it that was the blue in Joan's eyes? But they never did and after he bought the copies Mr. Beggins sent them out to James Junior, that was married now, a scholar and all and manager of an A & P in Dayton, Ohio, raising a fine family of his own and always after Mr. Beggins to give up the car washing and polishing and come out there with him and spend the last of his days comfortable and cared for. If there was one thing in the world he knew, be-God, it was the blue in Joan's eyes, but no, no, they never yet found it.

She was that young and soft, man dear, she died when James Junior was born, that young and pretty that Mr. Beggins sitting there on the throne and looking at her was always very happy for she was forever that young and that lovely, d'you see? The grief of parting from her waned and the pain of parting from young James (Mr. Beggins put the baby into a home with the Dominican Sisters on the East Side) was diminished as the boy grew into a fine lad that was one of the first drafted for the war. He remembered how shy she was when they went to have the picture taken, but thank God they did. She didn't want it, she said, looking the way she did only a month before James Junior was born, but the photographer told her and told Mr. Beggins on the q.t., too, that the face of a woman never bloomed, never in the world as it did when, by the grace of God she was bringing another soul into the world. A little beforehand, of course, he said, but not too long beforehand. It's a look they get is never seen at any other time. It's the eyes is the thing, he had said, the eyes above all and on the q.t., I'll tell you my friend, this is the best time of all to have the portrait made. Well, there she is. There was no frame around the picture, but Mr. Beggins, one day he was cleaning out a car that had been rented for a wedding, had found some streamers of crepe paper, green and red, white and blue. He made a square around the picture of Joan with the red, white and blue paper and the green he used for a border around the whole thing. And so it was, the eyes was the thing and, though they never found the blue that was the right blue, Mr. Beggins knew what the blue was and what if no one else could see it when they looked at the picture. It was how it was a blue all your own that no one else could ever know at all and when Mr. Beggins was showing the picture to the drivers, or the helpers on the ambulances or anyone else he would tell them the eyes was blue, the eyes was a deep sea blue.

Mr. Beggins was reaching an arm out toward the fur lined coat he kept hanging on the wall and in which he kept his pint when he heard the roller door of the garage bark on its chain. Looking over at it, the door stopped rolling upward when it was about three feet from the floor, he saw the rain pouring down into Seventy-second Street and the form of his friend, Ambrose Keliher spurt like a dancer into the garage. Ambrose was hopping on one foot and then another, swinging his hat in great arcs to shake off the rain when Mr. Beggins called out to him:

"Ambrose, Ambrose! You're ruining the radiators of them front cars there I was after breaking my back polishing the whole evening long. Drop the door, man! Drop the door before they're ruined entirely."

Ambrose quickly dropped the door and skipped over to the throne room.

"Would he come in by the small door that a sensible man would use? Would he? Not Ambrose. Not if I know Ambrose. Oh, no, in he comes by the roller door that splashes mud and muck over me radiators. (Mr. Beggins had the pint out of the pocket and the cork out of the bottle by this time and he stopped long enough to get a good long pull at the whiskey. He thrust the bottle toward Ambrose.) Here, take a sup of that. You'll take your death of cold if you're not half drownded already. Whatever brought you out on such a night anyhow?"

Ambrose had hardly started to drink when Mr. Beggins reached his arm out toward the bottle again. Ambrose gave it up with a little cough.

"Ah, the two had a row on, see," Ambrose said sadly, "the son after coming home the night before with a roaring drunk on him and the wife, she's a sly one for you, never says a word to him when he's like that, but the next night lashes it into him. So I took a sneak for myself—"

"A swim for yourself," Mr. Beggins remarked.

"—a sneak for myself before she'd start on me. That's what always comes next. Why don't I do this and why don't I do that and why don't I get out and land a job for myself. Why don't! Why don't! I hate them words. I hate the very sound of them words. . . ."

"Bad. Bad." Mr. Beggins said.

"I'll skip over and see Jim Beggins, I says to myself I'll see does he know of anything. I'll see has Jim heard of anything where the work wouldn't be too heavy for a man my age, I says to myself."

"And why Jim Beggins?" his friend asked. "Where would I hear of anything cooped up here with only them drivers coming in and out all times of the day and night? Where would I hear of anything, then?"

"I thought you might hear of something that wouldn't be too heavy. I thought there might be something here. . . ."

"Here? What would *you* do here, man?"

"Well, there might be a chance here with you. . . ."

"With me?" Mr. Beggins flapped the palms of his hands on his high rubber boots. "Sure I have all I can do to hang on myself, man. And what . . . what would you do when you come to the angels, now? What would you do with them angels? Go over there and have a look at one for yourself. Go on, have a squint at one of them angels on the far hearse there. Go on!"

Mr. Beggins rose to his feet and, pushing Ambrose ahead of him, started toward the hearse. Then, as if he had neglected something, turned back to the throne room again and took a hasty pull at the pint. He slipped it into the coat pocket again and followed Ambrose.

"Look here, now," he said, whipping a chamois out of his hip pocket and flicking it at an angel with clasped hands that stood on the nearest corner of the hearse. "That's damn delicate work, my dear man, on one of them angels. Look at them wings! How would them angels look after a green hand was at them feathers and pin feathers and all? How would they look sailing out to a funeral all smudged up by a green hand?"

"Well, I could. . . ."

"You could what, man? You could not! Would you go up and down that robe there on the angel or would you go across that robe with the chamois? How would you get out of a fix like that? You'd be lost, my dear man, lost beyond recall! Beyond recall!"

"It ain't all pin feathers is it?"

"All pin feathers no! There's more to it than pin feathers. That's the dainty part of it. Indeed there's more to it. There's the sanitary part of it, too. The sanitary part of polishing them ambulances spick and span outside and in on the ambulances. Every inch of the glass spick, span and sanitary. There's the polishing of the hoods, too and the bodies and the mud guards. Do you think them drivers care a damn where they roll them ambulances? *Do* you? Do *they* think of the work that goes into them on my part that they'd duck around a puddle or something? They do not! Yes, there's more to it. There's more than you think to it!"

"Ah, let it be, Jim. Don't trouble yourself about it."

"Look here, Ambrose, why don't the son go and see Mike about a job with one of the bus lines? He knows Mike, don't he? That'd be the thing for you. No fancy work there, you know. Straight away work all through it. There does be women to clean the insides of them, too."

"Ah, Mike. Sure there's thousands after him for jobs. Thousands."

"He could do it with a word. I might have gone on the buses myself one time. But after all you wouldn't compare the work with this, now, would you? You wouldn't find angels on the corners of the buses, I think. Not a bloody angel. There's more dignity to it here for a man. I'm my own master, you might say."

"Indeed you are, Jim," Ambrose declared watching Jim as he extracted the pint from the pocket again.

"See is that hall door shut tight, will you?" Jim asked holding the bottle on his knee.

"It is, Jim. I can see it is from here."

"Try it, will you. Will you try that door and keep that howling gale out of here. Will you see it closed tight so that raging storm wouldn't be blowing down the back of my neck and me after sweating over that hearse and all heated up from it? Will you do that for me?"

Ambrose sped to the door and rattled the knob, but before he was back Mr. Beggins had had another drink and this time slipped the bottle under the top of his right boot. There was plenty of room for it there because Mr. Beggins' legs were thin and wasted.

"The draught from an open door like that," Mr. Beggins said, "has nipped many a man in the bloom of life and carried him off with pneumonia before he knew what struck him. It's a dangerous thing to be sitting in a draught and you sweating and all heated up from the work. I can feel a chill like that a mile off. I was *always* like that. I could feel a chill the minute it crept into a place where I was working and I always took the greatest care of my health. I had to, d'you see, for I was always in the prime of condition."

"You're a well-preserved man today," Ambrose said. "Well-preserved for a man your age, Jim."

"That's it, see. At the first sign of a chill I took care of myself. In the stables there when I was younger I could smell a draught coming a mile off me. It was a dangerous thing in a stable with the heat of the horses and all if there was any kind of a draught at all. I could smell it a mile off. Indeed I could. That door's shut good and tight is it? You tried it yourself, did you? Thank God for that, then."

Ambrose sat himself on the running board of a limousine, wondering if Jim had put the bottle back into the coat or what. You couldn't be up to him. He was like that as long as Ambrose had known him. He might sit there all night and Jim wouldn't ask him to have another drink or Jim might haul the pint out any minute and pass it over to him.

"Always in the pink of condition no matter what," Mr. Beggins said. "When I was driving for the Rhinehausers, the big brewers there I was training like mad and one night I went a few rounds with one of the plug uglies that hung around where I was training and he give me the blackest eye you ever seen on a man. In the morning I was in the kitchen and Joan there, Lord have mercy on her, takes a look at the eye and near fainted with fright. It's nothing, I says, to the dangers of a chill. Well, she plastered the black all over with flour but that wouldn't take down the swelling of course and out I go to drive Rhinehauser, the brewer there, you know from the mansion down to the brewery and he takes a look at the eye and says was I kicked by a horse. He had a lovely pair of matched blacks at the time. A horse? No, says I. I was hit a punch in the eye, sir, says I. A punch says he? A punch, says I, whilst training, sir. I train every night, says I. Train for what? he says. I indulge, says I, in the manly art, sir. In the manly art of self defense, sir and I was hit a punch in the eye last night. But it's nothing at all, sir, to what it might be was I caught in a draught or something like that, I says. A draught or a chill is far worse says I, than a punch in the eye. I'd sooner two black eyes, sir, than one chill."

Mr. Beggins at last took the bottle from his boot and put it to his lips.

Ambrose sprang up from the running board and Mr. Beggins passed the bottle to him after he drank.

"A sup of that is a grand thing to ward off a chill," Ambrose said.

"It is. It is indeed," Mr. Beggins agreed "It is if not carried too far. There's such a thing as carrying it too far, you know."

"Ah, that's just what I tell the lad," Ambrose said. "Never carry a good thing too far. I'm always after telling that to the lad."

He was holding on to the bottle as he talked and Mr. Beggins reached for it. Before he tucked it away in the boot again he held it up to the light and made a grim face when he saw how much was gone from it. He hit the cork a tap of determination, making it quite clear to Ambrose that there would be no more drinks from it that night.

"That storm is quieted down I think," said Ambrose slowly. "And the storm at the house will be quieted down a little by this time, too, I think. I think I'll run along now and let you get to your rest."

"Well, come in whenever you get the chance, Ambrose, my gossoon," Mr. Beggins said. "Always glad to welcome a friend in need. Keep a stiff upper lip, now, and have the son see Mike about a job on the buses. It's work you could handle with no trouble at all, I know. It's all straight work on them. Go out the little hallway door, now will you, so that gale won't be splashing in all over the radiators of them cars there in the front."

Mr. Beggins took the bottle out again as soon as he heard the door closing after Ambrose and sat with it resting on his leg, taking a little of it every once in a while as he sat there thinking of how cosy and comfortable it was there and how lucky he was at his age to put in a job like this one. A good clean bed in the dormitory upstairs where the drivers slept. Sometimes it was lonely there all alone in the garage, but he could always walk to the corner coffee pot where he ate his meals, he could drop into Tom McGrath's on the corner for a sociable drink and a chat with Tom if Tom weren't too busy behind the bar, there were the papers to read, the bookie would drop in in the afternoon, the guy that sold the numbers tickets came in the morning and during the day there were always the drivers around the place. Mr. Beggins had names for all of them. Big Al he called The Professor, because Al was always reading a book when he was in the garage and never joined in the poker game with the others. Mr. Beggins never took a hand in the poker game because they were a crafty lot, those drivers and besides, Mr. Beggins thought it was better what with his work and all to keep them at a distance.

Friendly, but distant. Sundays were good. No washing or polishing. Mr. Beggins slept later Sundays and would come down to the throne room to have a look around before he went to Mass. He would get into the fur lined coat and always take a final look at his white hair, plastered close to his skull and sweeping down in a fancy curve over his forehead before he went out. He always arrived at the church before the earlier Mass was let out and stood on the curb, sometimes chatting with this one or that one if there happened to be someone he knew. He might take a walk around a few blocks after Mass while he waited for Tom to open up at one o'clock. Then he would have a good whiskey, a nice drink, he called it and go to the coffee pot for his dinner. He ate heartily and on Sundays he usually left a dime on the counter for the counterman.

One of the drivers was sure to have left the Sunday News around and Mr. Beggins read everything in it except the continued novels. The only thing he ever read in the Mirror if one happened to be around was Dan Parker's sport column.

He was getting drowsy now, but there was no hurry about anything since he didn't have to be down in the garage until eight anyhow and then he would be only puttering around to look busy if Burns or Scroog should drop in as they usually did sometime every morning. Still a man had to keep himself in trim with a good night's sleep every night just as though he were training for a fight now. He thought he'd have one more nice drink, then, smoke another pipeful and go up stairs to bed. He stowed the bottle in the boot, noticing there was only about another good drink left in it and smoked his pipe. He found himself yawning and knocked the bowl of the pipe out in his hand, throwing the warm ash out toward the drain in the cement floor of the garage. His back was tired and his legs seemed cramped and stiff when he got up and went to the stairs.

In a small room at the head of the stairs four of the drivers were playing poker and Mr. Beggins watched them for a while, wisely shaking his head when one of them took a pot as though he had known all along that was how it would go. The News' early edition was on a chair near them opened to its sport page. There was a picture of Doctor Walker putting the stethoscope on the chest of Sailor McCoy while Toughie Tamborini stood at the scales near by. They were the principals in the main bout at the Garden the next night. Mr. Beggins gently scoffed.

"Faugh," he said. "Pair of omadhouns."

"Think you could take the Sailor, Jim?" Big Al asked him.

"Take him? I've seen the day—yes, and two like. . . ."

"He's a fast boy, the Sailor," said the driver Mr. Beggins called Parnell because he was forever arguing the point about something or other.

"Wicked left," Big Al said.

"Look here," Mr. Beggins threw the paper to the chair again. "I seen them come and go from Jack Twin Sullivan, Mike Twin on down the line. Beer and cigarettes is no diet to train on, you know. I've seen. . . ."

"You were a tough man in your day, Jim," Parnell said, winking at the driver Mr. Beggins called the Ploughboy because he never yet had that ambulance out on a call he didn't come back with it covered in muck. Mud splashed over the hood and even on the glass side windows. The Ploughboy must be after churning the streets into mud whenever he went on a call, Mr. Beggins said, a born mudder.

Dinny, a little frog-eyed Liverpool Irishman who was helper on Big Al's car, said you could tell from the way Jim could weave around a room he must have been a fast man in the ring in his time.

Mr. Beggins was weaving a little at the moment. That fearful tiredness, that drowsy detachment the whiskey had given him was taking hold of him and he was trying to pull himself out of it, he wondered if they meant what they were saying or whether they were trying to make a fool of him. Should he treat them with ignorance, as he heard the fellow say one time and always thought a very fine way to speak of it, or should he tell them a thing or two. He wished, closing his eyes and pulling his head back to take a deep breath, he wished they meant what they were saying, he wished tonight he could sit down for a while and talk with them. Suddenly it was like putting up his guard in the old days, he decided no, a man never knew when these devils were trying to make a fool of him. You couldn't trust them, not one of them. No, he wouldn't. But still he couldn't let them go as far as they had already, especially that pop-eyed half an Englishman Dinny, without letting them know he could give as well as take.

"I've seen," he began slowly, "I seen . . . and let me tell *you* something, *you* there, Lloyd George. I tell you what I could weave. I could weave a ring of posies around the neck of that darling of the Coldstream Guards they sent over here one time years ago to take the country by storm. Yes, I could. And he wished to God they was posies was wove around him. He never knew whether they was posies or birds singing to him when I finished with him. That's what I could weave around the darling of the Coldstream Guards, see. I could weave that around him, Lloyd George, my boy."

"Never heard of him, never heard of him," Dinny said.

"Take it easy Jim," Big Al said. "Don't get your bowels in an uproar now."

"Jemmy Carberry, the Coldstream terror. Outweighed me eleven pounds. Five rounds it took me and he wished to God Almighty it *was* posies I plastered him with. That's what I could weave, Lloyd George."

"Never 'eard of 'im," Dinny said.

"Don't blow about it," Mr. Beggins said walking away from them to the room at the far end of the loft where the bunks were. The bottle slipped down his leg and he walked very carefully because of it.

Once in the room where a shaft of light cut across it to the narrow cot he slept on, Mr. Beggins sat on the edge of the bed and peeled his shirt off, throwing it to the foot of the cot. He reached down into the boot for the bottle, but had to painfully pull the boot off before he could get it. He held it in the light that came in the window and saw he could take one very short one, which he did at once, and have still a fair drink left. His mind was rasped by the few words he had had with the drivers, especially that half a damned Englishman, and he felt a little ashamed that he hadn't really got the best of him as he might have, he knew, if he hadn't had quite as much out of the pint.

"Ah, the hell with them. After all what do they know of anything. Crafty, slippery, God forgive me if I was younger, if I was, if I was half sober I'd. Why look here. Look at the brawn of the man. Look at the strength of the man here."

Mr. Beggins closed his fists and raised his arms out, drawing the forearms back and forth, clasping his right hand then over the sagging flesh of his left bicep from which the sleeve of his short undershirt hung in a deep loop.

"At the brawn and strength of the man still. Yes. (Looking at his closed fists again.) Yes, them is the ones that knocked Dandy Devlin flat in three rounds. Them is the ones did it in three fast rounds and he never knew what hit him. And the Twin. Or the night I faced Bat Swanson and the time I floored Nigger Calhoun. How many of them was there anyhow, felt the power the man had in him. How many of them was there felt the power of the man. Irish Johnnie Clancy. Irish, I says, Irish is it, you little dago. Whilst shaking hands with him and the referee turning his back. Irish, I says, you little dago. I'll make you wish you never heard of the Irish. No more Irish, he was no more Irish, the little dago than I'm a Zulu. A Zulu king. Ah, the savage battle that

Soldier Smith was met with when he stepped into the ring with the man that night in Jersey City. Or the Twin. What did the doctor say to Fancy Foley whilst sewing up the cut over the eye when he come to. Whilst stitching at him there like a tailor at work. That he never saw a man cut so deep with a punch over the eye. That was the night Fancy stepped into the ring with the man and got a taste of the brawn and the strength was in him. There was no stopping the man in them days. Not with two fists, there was nothing he faced ever stopped him. Nor the nigger in Bayonne. Towering over the man half a foot he was, too, until he was hit a punch on the jaw that laid him out. I'll never forget the way that nigger fell that night. I could hear the thump of his head like the sound of a lump of turf that you'd, that you'd throw on a coffin in the grave itself. The twenty rounds the man stood up against Willie Doyle. I'd like to see that half a damned Englishman stand up against Willie Doyle I would. Stand up twenty rounds with Willie Doyle slashing at him. Stand up for twenty rounds and have the brawn and the power to knock Willie Doyle out in the twenty-first round. Never heard of Jemmy Carberry, no and he didn't hear about the night, the night the man battled eighteen rounds before ever he got in the blow that knocked the front teeth from the face of Nigger Calhoun the second time I fought him in that town up the Hudson there and he drooling the blood from the mouth and a tooth dropping out with the blood and all and dropping on the floor. He never heard of that night neither, did he, Lloyd George there with the popeyes of a frog. No and he didn't hear about the no-decision twenty rounds with Young Kelsey. When the cops that was paid good money to stay away from it and mind their business come in and arrested the man and Young Kelsey and everyone else they could lay hands on. Whatever become of Young Kelsey I wonder? I never seen him from that day to this. Did he ever hear of the licking the man gave Johnny Riley, Chelsea Johnny Riley, that he didn't come to for half an hour after the fight and I seen staggering along the street afterwards and he stumbling, looking as drunk as a lord. Jack Twin Sullivan? Mike Twin Sullivan? I'd take the two of them in the same ring at the same time. Jack Twin that fought in the foundry there in the town the other side of Boston that night. Cambridge is it? Some kind of a bridge in it, anyhow. I cut him to pieces with the brother watching the fight and I says to him on the way out I'll accommodate yourself one day, Mike Twin, I says. And so I did, too. Ah, that was the fight. Jack Twin in his corner with him. I can see the little slits of his eyes. The little squints of eyes in him and me jabbing at them. The man had the power of a bull and he quick as a cat. What a filthy tongue he had in his head, too, that he'd—snarling at me and cursing and swearing the foulest talk ever I heard in my life there in the clinches and a groan coming out him every time I put one into the ribs. I cut him and I slashed him and battered him from one side of the ring to the other side and me chasing after him to get a punch into him that'd down him, the son of a. I lashed at him and knocked him from one corner to the other. I drove him back to the corner and laid it into him. I pushed him and mauled him and I hit him and back he'd come for more and I let him have a right and then I'd up with a hook when he'd come at me. I had the power of ten men that night. I'd break clean from every clinch and he cursing at me and back I'd come with a jab, jab, jab and cutting his face that his own mother wouldn't know him and let him have a hook that'd catch him on the chin and rock him back on his heels you'd think he was hit with a hammer. And me crouched over waiting for him there in the fourteenth or fifteenth, waiting for him to come in and the brother there with the bald head of him stuck half into the ring yelling and screaming and he cursing at me too all through it. I battered him and I bruised him and I cut into him with all strength in me and I spun him around the ring and the cursing till I backed him in the corner that I'd, that I'd cut him down and swung one after the other on him and battering him into the corner all the time and I, and I—no, wait now, no I didn't, God forgive me, no, I. No, he stretched me that night. Mike Twin fair stretched me that night in the eighteenth rou— But, but—"

Mr. Beggins yanked the cork from the bottle and drained it. He wickedly flung it out the window and heard it crash in the alleyway below. He stood up then, closing his fists and squaring off as he walked toward the window into the light. The one boot he hadn't taken off pounding, scraping a little and the stockinged foot thumping.

"But there's brawn in the man today. There's strength and there's power in the man today and I'd face him again I'd stand up to him today. I'd . . . bring on your Jack Twin or your Mike Twin Sullivans. Bring on your Mike Twin Sullivans. There's power and brawn in the man and yes, I've the heart for it, too. I've the heart for it. . . ."

Mr. Beggins lashed out with his right and stepped over to the bed again, spreading himself out on it.

"Yes, I've the heart for it, too."

TO MAKE MUCH OF TIME

by R. E. Kendall

They brought sweaters, for the day was cool. Squatting down in the gravel walk, Dorothy eased his doll arms into the sleeves of the red pullover she had knitted, while Harriet, slack lips tightened, stood by with her blue cardigan drooping in her hands. They were all silent there in the golden afternoon until Dorothy popped the jersey over Neil's head, squealing, "Where's the baby?" and "*There's* the baby," as she pulled it down gently. He looked gravely at her wrinkled grinning face and impassively submitted to her quick embrace.

As she gave a final pat and straightened up, Charlotte moved to take the blue cardigan from Harriet.

"This one, too, I think, Edward? You *won't* mind carrying it, dear? It *does* get so chilly later on."

Obedient to an unmistakable urgency in her tone, he reached for it. The pressure of her hand, the slow soft stirrings of his sisters, told him a bad moment had been averted. Harriet was appeased.

Charlotte looked round at them all. "And now we'd better be off. We'll have to—step on it?" She was habitually self-conscious about her colloquialisms, approaching them hesitantly and letting them explode on a questioning note. They all smiled vaguely, as at a polite mild joke; this too was habitual.

Edward watched, apart, as the women made their farewells to Neil. Dorothy's kiss was a nuzzling at his cheek and a murmured "Num-num-num." Harriet sank to one knee to gather him in her arms, and her eyes were wet as she pressed his head to her puffy yellow cheek. Charlotte contented herself with brushing the fine soft hair back off his forehead, and Edward knew as he saw her face contort in a spasm of tenderness that she was running over in her mind all the wise paragraphs she had read about emotional leavetakings. She turned to him then.

"You *will* be careful at the quarry? He's *so* venturesome and investigating."

She had begun talking in italics early in her pregnancy and had not left off. The weighted words never failed to irritate him, for they were as much at variance with the speech of the Charlotte he had married as her unremitting and imperfectly veiled apprehension was with her native good sense.

"Yes, yes," he said. "I shan't push him into the cut."

Her teeth bit down on her lower lip to steady it. Another woman might have been fighting tears, but of course Charlotte never cried. A reluctant compunction for the sharpness of his tone forced him to grin and reach out to press down the tip of her nose. It was an old play of theirs, serving to make ridiculous the need for apologies he could not demean himself to render, and she responded at once with the familiar screwing up of eyes that evaded his.

"Well—" she said. "Let's be off."

"Have a good time." He included them all in a benign smile that began with her, and took Neil's hand and started up the path.

They were rounding the corner of the house when a shrill "Bye-ee, bye-ee" arrested him. He looked back to see the three women lined up beside the station wagon. The swollen September sun glinted on their glasses; the light struck and splintered against three pairs of quivering lenses, and for an instant he was blinded to all there was of the women except the blank and glittering glass. Dorothy raised an arm; and the rest of them, and the world, sharpened into focus again.

He swung Neil around to face them. "Wave good-by to Mother and Aunt Harriet and Aunt Dorothy."

The boy squirmed away from his hand and stood unmoving and stolid. Charlotte and Harriet were waving now, Dorothy blowing kisses. With a snort of distaste for the silly business, Edward seized Neil's elbow and flapped the limp forearm.

"Bye-bye," shrieked Neil, and brought the other hand into play.

He continued to chant, flapping both arms like an ungainly fledgling, as they went on around the house, and Edward let him scamper in his blundering baby way, noting absently that the clump of chrysanthemums under the dining-room windows needed dividing. Next year—But there would be no next year in this house. They had bought it five years before, when there was no Neil nor any hope of him. It had suited them, though it was overlarge and old with an age still mustily obtrusive in spite of all their painting and airing, because it was isolated on thirty picturesque acres in a desert of worked farms. It had suited them well. Dorothy and Harriet had their own rooms and small preoccupations in garden and house. Charlotte's schedule was heavy with county club work, and Edward had found in his acres the peace and great wonders earth yields only to the city-bred. Yet they must relinquish their home, and everything it held for them. Neil was entitled to the baby prerogatives of playmates and excellent schools a good suburb would give him.

So next year's chrysanthemums were no concern of Edward's. He looked at Neil instead. The boy was rosy and beautiful. There he stopped. His son was rosy and beautiful and what else? Charlotte had assured him that he was safely above average physically and mentally, so if he felt a lack, it must be in himself. He tried again. His son was rosy and beautiful and—remote.

Finding the word gave shape to the nebulous unease that had walked with him from the moment he had looked through glass at the blanketed squirming thing he had sired. Before it was born, Charlotte had put his hand on her monstrous growth, and when he felt the vigor of the promised life, his eyes had briefly matched the exaltation in her own. But the separated actuality, the unclean whimpering thing that had reduced Dorothy to gurgles and Harriet to trembling awe, had almost repelled him. When he suggested a nursemaid, Charlotte had cited authorities ascending from Bundeson to Deutsch and with a passion unprecedented in their ten years of marriage insisted on exercising her motherhood.

She had painstakingly included fatherhood in Neil's life as well. This afternoon's walk was dedicated to it. The boy would have been safe and happy in the kitchen with hearty, indifferent Ella, while the women dutifully enjoyed their County Club Association meeting in White Plains, and Edward, left to his own devices, could have worked on his tree census. But he quite saw and appreciated the justice of Charlotte's intention when she suggested the walk to the quarry. Neil needed his companionship.

At the moment he was not getting it. Stock-still, his freshly whitened shoes planted solidly in the path, he was staring at a dragonfly scouting overhead. In three of his long strides Edward reached him. Here was opportunity.

"That is a very pretty dragonfly you have found, Neil," he said distinctly, giving each syllable slow and careful emphasis. "Its body is blue, and its wings are trans-par-ent."

Neil continued to stare, with mouth slightly agape and forehead creased in the intensity of his effort to follow the lovely darting creature with his eyes.

"Say 'dragonfly,' Neil."

Neil breathed the long sweet sigh of a baby waking from heavy sleep, and the rapt glow of his face vanished in a flashing grin. "Butterfly," he said.

"No, no. Dragonfly. Say it."

But Neil, oblivious, had hunkered down in the path to sift the clinking pebbles through his fingers. Edward felt the vein of choler swell and knot in his forehead as he looked down at the shining bent head.

"Neil," he said softly, "listen to Father. Little boys should learn the right names for things. That wasn't a butterfly, but a dragonfly. Say 'dragonfly.' "

Neil's fingers closed about a white stone, larger than the rest, round and smooth and flecked with glittering quartz. He rolled it over and over in one hand and caressed it with the fingers of the other, and then he cradled it in both. Suddenly he raised to his father a face transfigured by the infinite ecstasy of childhood and held out the stone in his cupped hands, like a votary freely offering treasure.

Edward seized the hands to jerk the boy upright and took the stone and flung it away with a violence that wrenched his shoulder. While he watched, all the lineaments of joy were stricken from Neil's face by the grim hand of fear. The small body shrank back, and the smiling lips stretched for a cry that Edward forestalled by shaking him roughly and pulling him forward.

"Come," he said, "we're out for a walk."

In a few minutes he tired of stooping down from his great height to keep his grip on the stumbling, whimpering child, and released him. "I beg your pardon," he told him. "You don't understand, but I beg your pardon nevertheless. My little man, my master, your servant begs pardon. If you will be so kind as to lead the way—" he turned the bewildered boy and sent him forward with a sharp spank—"I shall endeavor to trim my pace to yours. And keep to the path, you little halfwit."

They made slow progress. Happy again in his freedom, Neil stopped frequently to pursue matters of great moment—a woolly caterpillar, a yellowed birch leaf swirling to the ground, the bright berries of spikenard growing by the way. Edward let his rage dissipate on the early autumn air and reminded himself once more that he must make allowances, that Neil was only two years old. Only two, and next year he would be only three, and the next only four—the inevitable onlies piled up into a future of making allowances. When he was sixty, Neil would be only ten.

The path they followed wandered diagonally across Edward's thirty acres, rising from the pleasant lawn to the rim of the abandoned quarry marking the southern boundary, and he had had it graveled all its length so that they might enjoy their private wilderness even in wet weather. He liked to tell people, and it was true, that he held title to all the temperate zone had to offer, excepting only an ocean. The lawn gave way to the wanton grasses of a small meadow dipping to a slough and an uncertain brook that flowed out of it. Then the land rose again in a tangle of small trees to a stand of hemlocks and enough great oaks and hickories to suggest a forest, and at last to the outcrop of boulders at the knob of the quarried hill, where they could look down at the ancient churning rocks or out to the moderate mountains of Westchester. Except for spreading the path and clearing the windfalls, he had left it much as he found it, speaking wisely of ecologies but very little of his only half-acknowledged joy in the rank growth and the sweet rot smell of the woods, and the scurrying of the wild creatures who lived there on his sufferance.

As he lifted Neil up to the rustic bench he had installed at the summit of the hill, he saw that the boy's forehead was moist from the exertion of the climb, and forced him into the blue sweater. His hands, big and knuckled and hairy, were hard against the young flesh. He brushed the glowing face with his dry fingers, remembering how they bedded King David with a girl to keep the old man warm. He pinched the firm round chin, ungently, and sat down.

Constraint sat with him. Like any mush-mouthed boy, he fumbled for something to say, knowing that Neil, alone of all his world, was deaf to the sonorous words and rolling sentences instinct with him. Out of the far mists of his half-century, a rhyme came clear and apposite enough:

"The King of France
And forty thousand men
Marched up the hill
And then marched down again."

He said it aloud, slowly and rhythmically. "That's what we did, isn't it? We marched up the hill and soon we'll march down again."

Neil looked at him obliquely and briefly. Without a word he inched forward on the bench, turned about, and, bracing himself on elbows and knees, slid to the ground.

Edward let him go. He was, he reflected, no more to his son than another piece of the world's furniture, like the bench. More considerable, perhaps, since he had the power to frustrate, but scarcely more significant to a creature wholly preoccupied with his delightful self.

He stood sturdily now, surveying his world. With the surging, incalculable enthusiasm of childhood he ran to a flat outcrop of rock which squirrels had used for a banquet hall, and sat down with spread legs to devote himself to a private game with the hulls and acorn caps they had left behind.

Mindful of dampness and runny noses, Edward raised a beckoning arm. But Neil was too intent on his play to heed any summons short of a bellow, and the gesture was only sketched before his hand dropped back to the bench. At this point in time he was not equal to extorting obedience.

He had from the beginning, and with some pride in his forbearance, refrained from overexercising his rightful authority. Yet though rarely asserted, it was usually flouted. In remembered anger his fingernails scraped over the rough-hewn wood. Only yesterday, when a gusty rain had kept them indoors, and Charlotte had gathered them all in the firelit study for what she called a family afternoon, this child of his blood and being had flouted him. They had given him toys, and now and then they had looked up—Harriet from her knitting, Charlotte from her book, he and Dorothy from their cribbage—to smile at him and murmur, but he was not content and got up to wander around the room, fingering and prying.

Waiting for Dorothy to deal, Edward had looked up to see him bent over the scrap basket, laden with discarded notes from the morning's work on his book. "No, no, Neil," he said quietly. Instantly Neil tipped it over and stamped about in the crunching wads of waste paper. The cribbage board clattered to the hearth, and Harriet's gasp was loud as Edward strode across the quiet room. But he was calm, righting the basket and picking up the scraps as he explained quietly and reasonably that little boys did not upset waste-paper baskets. Neil helped pick up the litter, throwing his gleanings back into the basket with prodigious vigor and burbles of unregenerate laughter.

They had settled down again, and Dorothy had pegged a go, when Neil sidled over to the basket for the second time. Edward watched his progress and with a detachment bordering on dislike marked the cunning stealth of his approach and the furtive sidelong sweep of eyes glinting with mischief. "Neil!" He said it softly, but drew the syllable out into a rising inflection heavy with a warning that was disdained.

"Neil!" he repeated, sharply this time, and snapped thumb and finger with the loud crack he had decided on as the signal for instant obedience.

Neil squealed, as if they were playing a game and he the winner. He knocked over the basket with all his puny strength, and, squealing still, tramped gloriously in the mess.

Dorothy lurched back in her chair as the card table jolted against her. Charlotte half-rose in an agony of protest as Edward marched across the room. He ignored her, he ignored the trembling hand Harriet raised to hide her quivering loose mouth, and he reached for Neil to shake him and turn him over and beat and beat and beat—

That had been yesterday, but the fury that had possessed him pounded once more in his head. He rubbed his temples and drew long breaths to dispel it. "After all," he told himself, "after all! He's just a baby, he'll grow, he'll learn."

He tried to envision the growing of this soft alien creature whose erratic attention had skipped from acorn caps to the sparse hill grass. Next year, at three, he would still be a cunning little beast. At four, at five—he stopped at seven in the parade of years, for he remembered that the Catholics esteemed it the age of reason. Sharp as the near range of hills there rose before him the image of the comic-book rack in the village stationery store with reasoning, lately literate small boys perpetually a-gawk before it. Was it there a father found common ground with his son?

Hastily he went on to Neil at ten, at fifteen, with manhood foreshadowed on a face turned away from puerile joys. Turned to his father, surely. He could fancy people saying to the boy, "Your father is a great man." And Neil, awed but proudly familiar, would ask how it felt to be a judge, sitting in portentous black robes above the people. Edward would tell him, and tell as well how he came to that eminence from low beginnings; sketching the struggle to show that the small elegances and refinements of their life were hard come by and not for the generality of men. He would explain his debt—and, in honor, Neil's—to Harriet and Dorothy. He would point out that he had waited on security to marry a mature and capable woman who dwelt in harmony with him. He would explain that a man lived not by his work alone but by a constant intelligence directed to study of the world about him and his place in it: the stars, the seas, the vibrant earth—

And much more; for these were the things a father should speak of, to direct in his chosen way a child standing at the threshold of life.

The time-worn metaphor was ill-inspired. When Neil, at fifteen, was standing at the threshold, he, at sixty-five, would be doddering out the back door. He took a wry pleasure in pursuing the thought. Neil's tiny piddling hands would grow and lengthen and reach out to grasp the power and glory which his, stiffening even now, must relinquish. The aimless energy would burgeon into vigor while he lapsed into decrepitude. The rose-petal flesh, hardened over rippling muscles, would be eager and lusty when his was rotting in the earth. That was not a pretty child playing over there, but a hideous grinning portent, a grim measure of the inexorable years.

Edward sat motionless for so long that a late towhee was emboldened to scrabble in the layered leaves just behind the bench. The rattling finish of the bird's triad call roused him. "Morbid, morbid," he muttered, and shook his head and smiled at himself. "Having fun?" he called heartily to Neil, who was wandering from one sun-warmed outcrop of rock to the next, no death's head at all, but a lovable small animal exploring fissures and striations with inquisitive paws.

He did not answer, nor even look up when his father said gently: "Better come this way, Neily. You're getting close to the edge." It was there again, the stubborn pursuit of his own way in defiance of reason and command. With an effort Edward kept his voice low. "Neil, Father wants you to come here. Now. Neil!" He snapped his fingers, and the sound, thin and ineffectual in the open, released the flood of anger that had overwhelmed him the day before.

He fought it. He had half-risen, but the memory of the women's faces, shocked, incredulous that their old god should chastise the new, forced him back to the bench. He thought: "I should let him go, I should let him fall. That would teach him!" and thrust the idea away in shamed astonishment that he could descend to such vindictive childishness. "Neil!" he called again.

Deliberately the boy advanced to a triangle of jagged boulder jutting up and away from the solid earth into nothingness. He dropped on knees and hands to negotiate the slope, and Edward stared at the fat solid buttocks humping up and down as he inched forward. In a moment or two that delectable body might slip, might sprawl on the air, might turn and twist and hurtle down to the cruel waiting rocks.

Another fear, of what a man's mind may come to, impelled him to his feet. He reached the boulder just as Neil stood up at the apex, and turned, ignorant of all fears and exultant, to look triumphantly at his father for approval. What he saw stiffened his tiny exhilarated body. As the mouth opened for laughter widened for a cry, he took a step backward, and staring at the empurpled face bending above him, trembled and took another step with a foot that fumbled over the ledge.

Edward collared him in time. When he had finished with him, he was limp and trembling, as if he had exorcized his own devil. He rubbed his smarting hand up and down his thigh while Neil lay screaming at his feet, and raised his voice above the shrieks. "You see what happens when you don't obey? You might have been killed. Listen to me, Neil. Stop that howling and listen." He stooped down. "Look at me!"

As he turned the child over he saw that his brief pants were wet, and was forced to conquer a moment's revulsion before he could offer the physical comfort of his arms. "Neil, Neil, you must learn to obey me. Don't you understand? You might have fallen, you might be dead. You must mind me. . . ."

Under his awkward, unaccustomed pats, the sobs abated. He kept up the flow of words mechanically, only half-aware of what he said in the intensity of his desire to be done with it all, to get off this ruined hillside to where he could be himself again. "For your own good, mind, mind, mind—" he was saying when he felt Neil's hands playing with his shirt buttons and realized that the anguish had yielded to hiccups. They regarded each other gravely. Then,

"Time to go home," Edward said.

Neil hiccuped once more and sighed and submitted to being set on his way. He stumbled a little in fatigue and was slow, but Edward trailed the stained bedraggled figure patiently. His passion was quite spent; he did not protest when his charge, merry again, left off his trudging for forays into the growth beside the path, but only waited till it pleased him to come back.

They were halfway home when Neil stripped off a handful of reddening sumac leaflets and held them bunched up in his fist. Idly his father watched him stoop and pluck till he carried a ragged bouquet: dead clover heads and dusty grasses, the blackening berries of Solomon's Seal, mint flowers dying to seed. "That's enough, come along," he called when the small hand was so full it crushed what it did not lose.

"I am beyond anger," he told himself with some satisfaction; his son was deaf to the command, yet he continued to watch, if not indulgently certainly with detachment. "Don't let *me* stop you," he said aloud.

The words struck on his ears with the shrill echo of spite just as Neil, dripping bruised greenery, stopped entranced before a glowing red stem bearing white fruits stiffly in an open angled head.

"Mustn't touch," he said quickly.

Neil put out his free hand to shake a desiccated leaf.

"Neil! I said don't touch that." Edward looked at the golden head shining beautifully so far below, and the hand he had raised for a snap of fingers went up to smooth his own grayed hair. "You must not touch that plant. It is very pretty, but you must not touch it."

The willful boy dropped his bouquet and ran both hands up the glorious stem. He pulled and tugged, but it was stout enough to resist him, so he fondled the berries and plucked them off and one by one dropped them into his left hand to jiggle. When he had done, he needed both hands to hold them safely, and not until then did he look up.

They stood there five feet and fifty years apart, and by some trick of dimming vision or the setting sun, the man saw the boy clothed in radiance. He seemed to stand there unearthly and apart, transfigured godlike by a nimbus of immortality. His splendor was intolerable. Edward closed his eyes against it and blinked them and looked again, at an inconsiderable, insufferable, dirty little child. Unwittingly he smoothed his knotted forehead with a steady hand before straightening up to feel his full height and ascendancy.

"Neil, a little while ago Father told you that you must obey him. What he tells you is for your own good. You should not play with that flower or put the berries into your mouth. They're bad for little boys."

The baby's face lit and sparkled in a smile. "Mouth?"

"You must not put them into your mouth. Come, now. We're going home. Throw the berries away and come with me, and I'll tell you all about them." He waited a moment before he turned, and moved away without looking back. "Come, Neil. Some people call those bad berries 'doll's eyes,' because that's what they look like, all china-white with the big black dots. Their real name is *Actaea alba,* and that's pretty, but hard to say, so we'll call them by still another—baneberries, and bane means bad. . . ."

He walked ahead, still talking, and he did not look back. His son juggled the berries in his hands and in that quick covert way of his glanced up and around. He laughed a little, a pleased and silly giggle, and bent his head to his dirty fists while they crammed the pretty fruits into his mouth. Then, stubbornly munching and swallowing, he ran to catch up with his father.

THESE LITTLE THINGS HAPPEN TO GIRLS

by Wendell Wilcox

"I CAN'T help it," Mrs. De Jong said, "it just gives me the cold chills. Sometimes I wake up at night and wonder if it might not be just creeping along every moment."

She was sitting sideways on her chair with one scraggy arm laid out on the white table cloth, her spoon grazing the edge of a peach.

"But what difference does it make?" Mr. Booker said. "We all die some day, don't we? Did you ever think of that, Mrs. De Jong? Everybody is going to die. It really doesn't matter a bit."

He turned his eyes toward Anna Louise and looked at her. His face was extremely solemn. His eyes were an indefinite color that might have been gray or blue. Some people might call them hazel, Anna Louise thought. Herself, she could think of no word to call them.

"My mother is a very sensitive woman," Mr. De Jong said. He laughed a little. "You shouldn't display your macabre humor in front of a lady of that type."

Mrs. De Jong screwed up her mouth. Her head shook a little from side to side and her loose, faded blond hair quivered beside her cavernous cheeks.

"I think Gwendoline Anne better go to bed," she said.

I hate that woman, Anna Louise thought. She had had that thought every day, sometimes several times a day, for over nine years now and it always gave her a kind of satisfaction.

"Well, trot her off. Trot her off," she said, and she looked back at Booker. He was still looking at her. Why, she wondered, is he looking at me like that?

"Don't be so brusque with mother," Mr. De Jong said. "You know she's broody."

She's broody all right, Anna Louise thought, and we all know why. She's afraid of something. We know what, too. That's why she wakes up and thinks about things like that.

"Why are you staring at me that way, Mr. Booker?" she asked abruptly.

"What way?" Mr. Booker asked.

She looked at him with an air of defiance.

"Like that," she said. "Like that."

His face was long, his head egg-shaped with a fringe of fine blond hair running around the middle of it. There was too much flesh on it, all of it pink. He raised his hands, resting his chin upon them, and stared back at Anna Louise.

"I hadn't realized I was," he said, but he still was, still was. She bit her lips.

"Skip it," she said. She wondered now why she had ever asked the question.

She looked at her husband and saw that he wanted to remind her of her manners a second time, but since he had already done it once and corrected Booker as well, she could see that he didn't quite have the courage for a third attack on the emotional rampages of those around him.

He lowered his head and sighed.

"Oh, well," she said. "I liked what you were saying. Those obvious remarks can sometimes be very profound. There's only one thing about death that's ever bothered me. That's getting buried, you know. I wouldn't mind a nice cremation if only they didn't lower you into a hole to do it. Why can't they just have it on top in the open air?"

"The Indians. . . ." Mr Booker began, but before he could get any further Herbert De Jong stood up and interrupted him.

"Good Lord," he said, "why do we have to be so morbid?"

Mr. Booker looked at her again, and, yes, certainly there was something a little odd about his stare.

They went into the living room and settled down. They had been there but a minute or two when Mrs. De Jong returned from bedding down Gwendoline Anne.

"Little children shouldn't have to hear such things. I had an awful time getting her to bed, too. I do hope her little mind isn't going to dwell on it."

"Oh, her little mind," Anna Louise said, but she was thinking of Booker's stare. She thought about it off and on the rest of the evening and was still thinking about it while she and Herbert were getting ready for bed. After Herbert had got in she pulled out the light and stood by the window thinking of the expression on Booker's face. It meant something. But what?

"What are you doing by that open window?" Herbert asked.

"Thinking."

"Well, can't you think just as well in bed?"

She said nothing. She was thinking of Booker's hands. They were heavy and pink as hams, and the blond hairs bristled on them in an outrageous, rather indecent way. He does keep his nails very nice, she thought. Outside in the street a man was hurrying by through the soft imperturbable drizzle of the rain. He was whistling ***Symphonie***. It sounded very pretty at that hour in the empty street.

She turned around and got into bed.

"Why are you always so bad to Booker?" Herbert asked. "He's been coming here for five years now and you've never been really decent to him. I don't see why he comes back."

"Oh, I'm never very good to people I don't care for," she said. She moved to the edge of the bed. I'll be asleep before I count seven thousand, she told herself. Every night she set herself a slightly different number of counts and if it didn't work by the third time over, she got up and had a slug of whiskey. But tonight it worked.

It was four o'clock when she woke up. She heard the hour strike. Perhaps it was the clock, perhaps her thought that had wakened her; anyhow it was clear as day to her now: that expression on Booker's face meant only one thing. Well, how long had that been going on? Had it been from the first? But he had never looked at her like that before. Yes, that was the way they looked when they felt that way. It certainly was. There couldn't be any doubt about it at all.

He was such a large solid man. She had never cared for that type. Had he thought about her a lot? she wondered. She tried to imagine Mr. Booker thinking about her. How did he do it? What kind of thoughts did a man like that have when he was in love with a girl? She thought of Booker in his bath, lying flat out, staring up at the ceiling, dreaming of her. His feet, she wondered, what they were like?

The next day being fine, she took Gwendoline Anne for a walk in the park. The sun was shining and the grass was dry. Gwendoline Anne wore a short frilly dress and a large pink bow that her grandmother had put on her hair.

I wish I could love that child properly, she thought, but how could anybody love children, even their own? For a while Gwendoline Anne walked beside her in her priggish little way, pretending to be nicer than the other children they met on the path. Then she forgot herself and ran at the pigeons to frighten them.

"Stop scaring those birds, Anna Louise said in a cross voice. Why, she wondered, did children always want to scare animals and pretend they were better than everybody else? She could not imagine.

"They're so beautiful," Gwendoline Anne said, smirking at her mother. "I just like to see them fly. Aren't they lovely when they fly, Mummy?"

But Anna Louise was silent. Mr. Booker, falling in love with her like that. Just imagine. Well, she couldn't have it, that was all. She just couldn't.

"That silly old granny bothered me so last night," Gwendoline Anne said, taking her hand.

"She did? What did she do?"

The child was taking this method of placating her because she knew she didn't care much for Mrs. De Jong. Sometimes she would tell her long stories about how silly her grandmother had been. On the other hand Anna Louise had often heard the child telling Mrs. De Jong how much she suffered from her mother's critical attitude toward her. An opportunist, that child. She did wish she'd shut up. She was trying to think about Booker. The next time he comes, she thought, I must get him alone somehow, and show him the whole thing is perfectly ridiculous.

"Yes," Gwendoline Anne said, "she woke up and she began blubbering about how it was coming. I couldn't get a wink of sleep. She kept holding onto me and saying, 'Oh, little Gwendoline Anne.' Isn't she a silly grandma?"

"Well, she just can't help it," Anna Louise said. But how was she to get him alone? She tried imagining that for some reason or another everybody had left the room for a moment. She saw Booker beginning to look at her and she imagined herself standing up and saying to him in her most dignified manner, "Now Booker, you've got to stop that. It just won't do at all." In her mind's eye he came closer and gave her a Heathcliff look, dark and threatening, and then before she could protest he took her into his arms and was kissing her. "Ouch," she thought, "you beast, you're hurting me."

"But what is she scared of?" Gwendoline Anne said.

"Oh, it's the atom bomb," Anna Louise said crossly.

She was thinking of Mr. Booker's stomach. He had a slightly protruding stomach. He was very large all over.

"Well, isn't that silly?"

"Of course, it's silly, but your grandmother is getting on. She stews about things."

No, she couldn't speak to Mr. Booker, not there in the house at any rate. But perhaps she might write him a note. A short note simply telling him.

"Well, what things?"

"What?"

"What things make Grandma stew?"

But it had happened so suddenly. Why hadn't she seen symptoms of it before? Perhaps she could simply ask him when it had all begun. She might just say. . . .

"It was all old Mr. Booker's fault," Gwendoline Anne said, laughing and kicking her feet. "He talked like that on purpose to scare her, didn't he, Mama?"

"Mr. Booker certainly did not try to scare your grandmother. Why would he want to do a thing like that?"

"Oh, I know. Mr. Booker's an old tease. Mr. Booker pulls my hair and says, 'Do you want me to take your pretty bow away from you, young lady?' I guess I know Mr. Booker's a tease."

Anna Louise looked down at her daughter's head. She looked at the hair bow. She thought of Booker holding the child's head between his big hands. "How long, Mr. Booker," she was writing mentally, "have you been thinking about me in this way? Not that I care, but it's a matter of curiosity, you know. After all, you've been coming to our house for several years."

"Mummy darling, talk to me," Gwendoline Anne said pathetically.

"For Lord's sake, Gwendoline Anne, do be still. Just for five minutes, anyhow."

"If Mr. Booker isn't a tease why does he untie my bow?" Gwendoline Anne asked, ignoring her mother's admonition.

"Well, you're a little girl and with little girls it's different. He's only playing with you, but he wouldn't want to tease an old woman like your grandmother."

She felt a fool making these long explanations to a child. Children understood nothing. They just talked in order to pretend they were intelligent, or to impress older people. Still, it was true there must be a streak of *something* in Mr. B, playing with *her* the way he did, staring at her as if she were a mouse he wanted to eat. It made her shudder a little. How long, she wondered, would it be before he came again? A week anyhow. Maybe two. Maybe it would be a whole month. She supposed that he suffered from being able to see her so rarely.

As a matter of fact it was three weeks before Herbert told her that Booker was again invited to dinner.

"And do be pleasant to him," Herbert said. "He's really a very fine person, really a very intelligent man, and after all I have to work with him."

"Intelligent is hardly the word," Anna Louise said. "He's a physical type, rather gross, and it's true that he has a certain physical intelligence. That can be very deceptive, you know."

"Oh, Anna Louise, you do have the silliest ideas. Booker's large but he's bright, and as for physical intelligence, he can't even ride a bicycle. He's got no coördination at all."

Anna Louise saw Mr. Booker lying on a gravel path, his legs tangled in a bicycle, his blue eyes . . . blue gray they were . . . staring helplessly up at her out of an injured helpless face that had turned from pink to red. One hand lay just off the path, palm upward, in a bed of pansies.

I will watch, she thought, I will watch very carefully.

And, yes, she was certain, at dinner there were glances. Not that his face would change expression at all, but that was a disguise. He wanted no one to notice but her. When he was laughing he would not allow his face to relax perceptibly, but his eyes would dart out at her through the smile, like birds flying out of a bush. Or if he were solemn he would simply look at her, look right into her. Oh, my yes.

Oh, if only I'd written it, she thought, I could drop it into his pocket while I was helping him on with his coat, but unfortunately she hadn't. Why didn't she have her note ready? This couldn't go on. It made her too nervous.

Being conscious of the fact that he was watching her in a certain way made her walk with extreme restraint whenever she got up to get anything. Yet for Herbert's sake she had to make an effort. There was no reason to annoy Herbert by being cold. When Booker spilled a little coffee on his necktie, she got up immediately and wiped it off with her napkin.

"Oh, Booker," she said, "you're such a slob." She laughed gayly and looked at Herbert to see whether he appreciated the gesture. He was looking calm and pleased. He laughed a little at her joke. She tried to think of some other way of being nice to Mr. Booker. All during coffee she was trying to think up some special little attention. But she could think of nothing but music. She would play the Victrola for him when they got into the living room.

"I don't want any more of that bomb talk tonight," she said as if to excuse her opening the machine. "You know you scared poor Mrs. De Jong so badly she couldn't sleep all night. No, tonight we're going to be cheerful. We're going to have music."

They played several records and talked about music. Gwendoline Anne insisted on dancing. She jumped about obnoxiously and held out her skirt, kicking and showing her underdrawers.

"She has a tremendous ear," Mrs. De Jong said, "but I'm afraid she ought to go to bed now."

She gathered her darling into her arms and carried her fondly away.

"Do you dance, Booker?" Anna Louise said.

"I never did very much."

"Wouldn't you like to try a nice old fashioned waltz?" The idea of dancing seemed a pure inspiration. "Come on, we'll have a little waltz."

"Oh, I couldn't," Mr. Booker said. He laughed and she knew he wanted to be coaxed. Perhaps while they were dancing Herbert would have to go to the bathroom and she would have a chance to speak to Booker about his conduct. It was so obvious really, she couldn't conceive how both Herbert and Mrs. De Jong hadn't noticed it. Still, it was clear neither of them had. Oh, dancing was an inspired thought all right, for she could kill two birds with that lucky little stone.

"Herbert says you have no physical sense," she said, "but I'll bet you have. I'll bet you're a swell dancer. Heavy people so often are."

"I can't imagine why Booker would want to dance, Anna Louise. Why don't you stop pestering him?"

"Well, it's just an experiment. I want to see about his physical sense."

It was just like Herbert to be displeased with the very things you were doing for him out of compliance.

"Besides," she added, "we're always doing the same old things. Just sit sit sit, talk talk talk. We should have little changes now and then."

With that she set spinning a waltz and dragged Booker out of his chair. He danced very badly, it was true. She felt as if she were just lugging him around the room. But there was something to the way he moved, she could tell. Undoubtedly it was only his shyness that made him clumsy.

"Oh, dancing," Mrs. De Jong cried as she came back into the room. "How very nice. It's been fifteen years since I've had a little dance."

"I think Herbert might dance with you," Anna Louise said. "Put on something else, Herbert. We'll all two-step now."

They progressed through the two-step into the fox trot. Anna Louise was laughing merrily and hauling Booker around the room. I wonder, she thought, whether he has flat feet? Now with old Mother De Jong back there was no chance at all of her having a second alone with the man. She tried to think of something to say, something to convey the fact she had noticed and disapproved. He was perspiring from the unusual exercise and had begun to smell quite strong.

She looked at him with an expression she hoped was somewhere between grim and pensive.

"You're an odd man," she said softly, but he only grunted and trudged on.

"A very odd man," she added with rising emphasis, but it had no effect at all.

Herbert and Mrs. De Jong had stopped dancing and as she let go of Mr. Booker she noticed that her mother-in-law was watching her with a look that was half tart, half quizzical. There, Anna Louise, thought, somebody has noticed something at last. Mrs. De Jong smiled reluctantly.

"It was a splendid evening, wasn't it?" she said to Herbert as they were getting ready for bed.

"I don't know why you wanted to make Booker dance," he said. "Men hate dancing, but women always seem to want to."

"I think Booker quite enjoyed it, and your mother had a wonderful time."

"Men only like dancing when they're young. It's only because it gives them an excuse," Herbert said. He was sitting on the edge of the bed pulling off his undershirt.

Ah, yes, Anna Louise thought, that's true enough. Perhaps she would have to write Booker a note after all. She wondered what she could say. "I have come to certain conclusions," she composed as she stretched herself out beside Herbert. "It was for that reason that I wanted to dance the other evening. In order to confirm my suspicions. Of course, it's ridiculous, Booker. I am an old married woman, and you . . . well, you're much older. After all, let us be frank. I am twenty-nine and you are nearly forty-five, a friend of the family. Let us call a halt now before the whole thing has gone too far and you have done something foolish."

She was still thinking of the letter the next day. She and Mrs. De Jong were sewing together in the living room. Mrs. De Jong was working on a dress for Gwendoline Anne and Anna Louise was trying to make a little headway with the family darning. It would really be a little risky to send a letter. Men were so careless about such things. Of course, the movies were no guide to life, but still they were always finding letters in the movies. There might be something in it. No, a letter was really not advisable.

"It was really quite a gay little party last night, didn't you think so?" she said to Mrs. De Jong.

"Yes, it was very nice, but really, Anna Louise, do you think you ought to have?"

Mrs. De Jong looked up through the gold-rimmed spectacles she always wore when sewing. She bit off a thread.

"Why certainly. Didn't it make it much nicer?"

"Well, I'm an old woman. Oh, not old really, but I've been through a lot of life and I see things."

Anna Louise folded her sox and selected another pair.

"And what do you see?" she asked.

"Well, I think Mr. Booker might misinterpret," she said in a solemn kind of way.

"Misinterpret what?" Anna Louise said in a cold voice.

"Well, there's no use in creating difficulties, you know."

Mrs. De Jong was looking straight into Anna Louise's eyes.

"I think you're evil-minded," Anna Louise said firmly.

At that Mrs. De Jong burst into tears and threw the dress she was stitching onto the floor.

"Oh, Anna Louise," she cried, "I've had such a hard life and nobody has any sympathy for me. How can you say such a cruel thing?"

"Well, you shouldn't make accusations about things when you know nothing about them."

"I just . . . oh, it's just . . . well, I know. I was so bad. I was such a terribly bad woman, and I've suffered so for it."

She began to snivel.

"That's no reason for you to suppose other women are bad too."

"But I didn't want to be bad. When I think about it, when I think how mean I was to poor Mr. De Jong when I should have done everything I could to make life easy for him, I just get frightened."

Anna Louise began to darn very carefully. She said nothing. Of course, everybody knew all about that. She had killed old Mr. De Jong with maliciousness. A queer way of going about things. She had hated old Mr. De Jong and she had done everything she knew to make life so hard for him that finally he just had to get sick and die.

"Don't make trouble for Herbert. Don't do it. You'll regret it to the day you die. I tried so hard with Albert De Jong but everything I did turned out wrong. And sometimes I just can't bear it."

Tears were running down her cheeks and she was looking at Anna Louise without the slightest show of pride or shame.

"You brood too much," Anna Louise said. "Can't you ever stop pawing over your old mistakes."

"Oh, why do you hate me? I always try so hard to make everybody happy and everything just always turns against me."

She caught up the discarded dress and covered her face with it.

Guilty, guilty, Anna Louise thought, and wants everybody else to look guilty too. Imagine accusing her of being interested in Mr. Booker.

"As a matter of plain fact I find Mr. Booker just a little repulsive," she said. "I've never either liked or disliked the man, but Herbert is always dinning it in to me that I must be nice to him. I don't know that I've ever not been, but the first time I try to be a little nice in order to please Herbert, you have to start seeing things. Why, I wonder, do I ever go an inch out of my way to please either of you?"

Mrs. De Jong uncovered her rumpled face and stared at Anna Louise with wonder and disapproval. Then she got up and left the room.

Anna Louise sighed.

I suppose, she thought, some women might find all that heaviness very attractive. A lot of men with those big heavy torsos had no legs. Booker however had good heavy legs that went well with the general bigness of his frame.

She had never heard of any woman in his life, but he really couldn't be just plain celibate, could he? She let her mind play with the notion of Booker and the ladies. Did he have some girl friend whom he visited?

She let her work fall into her lap and stared out of the window.

Some men just naturally dreaded marriage. Well, she could understand that.

Outside the sunlight sifted down through the trees, falling in golden crumbs upon the grass. How black the shadows were. Nature was so restful, but people . . . well, why did they fuss so? How many women had there been in his life? How many had tried to hook him? Probably he was always squirming out of their clutches. And now here he was giving her those terrible devouring looks. The fact that she was already married probably made her seem less dangerous. The thought had a certain nasty realism about it, she supposed. At any rate, she would have none of him, and she needed no assistance from mean interpretations of his motives.

If she were to go to the phone right now and call him at the office, what, she wondered, would his face look like? But, of course, that would be dangerous. The girl at the desk would know her voice. When she had been a girl in high school she had often called up friends and talked to them in a disguised voice. Sometimes she had put a handkerchief over the mouth piece, imagining that that would alter the sound of her voice. But probably it did not. Oh, girls, they did such silly things. Any attempt to make her voice sound different would make her feel silly now. All the same, she would have to speak to him soon. There was no telling what outlandish thing he might do next time he came . . . or the time after.

As a matter of fact the next time was pretty bad. He brought her chocolates. Not that there was anything unusual about that. He always brought her something.

"Sweets for the sweet," he said as he handed her the box.

My God, Booker, she thought, do you have to be so damned obvious, so damned banal. She smiled and thanked him nicely despite the inanity of his remark. She supposed it was knowing the wrong sort of women all his life. Women, of course, trained men to have whatever kind of manners they eventually had. He must have known a lot of silly, vulgar little women. Really, he did deserve better. He did have his fundamental little fineness, no matter how hidden.

"There's cherry pie for dinner, Booker," she said. She had made it especially for him, his favorite pie.

"Oh, cherry pie," Gwendoline Anne said. "I think cherry pie is scrumptious, don't you?"

That child, Anna Louise thought, she's as bad as Booker's playmates. I expect she'll disgrace me yet. God knows she had tried with the brat, but despite all she could do, there she was, common as a cat.

After dinner a feeling of playful irony made her set Gwendoline Anne on Mr. Booker's knees. Booker did the expected. He began to tease her about her bow. I knew it, I knew it, Anna Louise thought, a perfect pair, Gwendoline Anne and Mr. Booker.

"Why have you never married, Booker?"

He looked at her and smiled.

"Never found the right girl," he said. "Gwendoline Anne's my girl. I guess I'll just wait for her."

He was looking, however, at Anna Louise while he made these trite remarks. His real meaning, his real feeling was perfectly clear, of course. She cast a glance at Herbert and Mrs. De Jong. Herbert was pouring out beer and paying no attention at all, but Mrs. De Jong eyed her eerily from a face calculated to seem passive.

"Bed time, Gwendoline Anne," she said and she rose up stiffly and took the child from Booker's lap. Her tone of voice, her movement said quite clearly, there are some atmospheres a child should not be asked to breathe.

The next day Mrs. De Jong showed all the usual signs of one of her bad nights. It was clear, however, that she was resolved not to talk. All the time they were doing the dishes she kept her face half turned away and limited herself to nothing but the most practical remarks. Whenever she met Anna Louise's eyes her own eyes had a look both hurt and resigned. Oh, yes, they seemed to say, I will keep my nose out of your business.

That damned martyr, Anna Louise thought, that damned hypocritical martyr. But to tell the truth she wished the woman would say something. The air of silent accusation was really getting almost too oppressive.

"Why in heaven's name don't you spit it out?" she said, feeling she couldn't stand it a minute longer.

"I say nothing," Mrs. De Jong said quietly but with intense determination.

"You say nothing." Anna Louise uttered each word separately, filling them with all the disgust she could muster. And she threw the plate she was wiping onto the floor.

She wiped her hands on the towel and left the room.

In the bedroom she began to put on her makeup. Life had to go on. There were pork chops to buy, and a loaf of bread, two dozen oranges and a tube of tooth paste. When she came back into the living room Mrs. De Jong was sitting in the rocking chair with folded hands. Her eyes were red and her face wrecked-looking. She bit her lips and stared at Anna Louise.

"Well, I'm sorry," Anna Louise said. "I'm not an extremely sensitive woman but things do work on me."

"You can go too far, daughter," Mrs. De Jong said. "Mark my word, you can go too far. If it wasn't for Herbert and Gwendoline Anne don't think that I'd stay here for a moment and take your sass and watch your machinations."

Anna Louise adjusted her hat before the mirror.

"Oh, don't be silly," she said. "There's nothing new about mothers-in-law and their son's wives. It's just a lot of well known and pretty tiresome psychology. Let's skip it."

Outside, the sunlit street was calm and matutinal. How intangible and yet how domineering a mood could be. She supposed she ought not to have been so outspoken with Herbert's mother. She was morbid. Her mind did dwell on things. Now she'd got this bee in her bonnet she'd spend most of her night stewing about the matter. Her morbidity would affect everybody, would destroy even the sunlight in the street. Well, perhaps if she didn't insist on drinking coffee every night before she went to bed she'd sleep more and brood less. Ah, there was no telling what that woman wouldn't do if she went on using her imagination about Booker much longer. Something had to be done.

Perhaps the simplest thing really would be to call Booker and meet him somewhere for a little talk. She could go into town Saturday morning, call Booker as soon as he got home from work and have him meet her in a bar. A little cocktail just before dinner. Really that would not be so very difficult.

Booker, she could say, I understand. When these things hit a body late in life they're apt to be pretty intense, but you should try to appreciate the fact that I have a husband and child. It's not as if I were a single woman. And those looks of yours, someday Herbert's going to notice them.

She'd better do it this Saturday. The sooner the better.

"I'm going downtown tomorrow morning and get some stuff for Gwendoline Anne. She needs a lot of new underclothes," she told them at dinner on Friday evening.

"That's fine," Herbert said. "You can meet me at one o'clock and we'll have lunch somewhere and then go do our shopping."

"Well, Herbert," she said, "I've got such a lot to do. I want to try to get some stockings. You know what that means. Standing in line hours getting a ticket, standing around some more getting the stockings. You wouldn't want to fuss around with all that."

"Oh, don't bother with stockings. Why can't you go bare-legged? A lot of women do these days. I kind of like it."

"I loathe a bare leg."

"We could have lunch, get Gwendoline Anne's stuff and then go to a movie. Wouldn't that be fun?"

"No, Herbert, I simply have to have the stockings. I'm not a school girl and I can't go around naked in a pair of sloppy slippers and wool bobby sox."

"Well . . ." Herbert said. He looked rather hurt.

Mrs. De Jong looked from one to the other of them with set lips. She started to speak, stammered a little, and finally brought out, "Women get more particular about their appearance every day." It sounded rather weak. She'd obviously wanted to say something else.

She got into town shortly after noon on Saturday and shopped around in a nice leisurely way until one-thirty which was the very earliest moment she could call Booker. He wasn't home yet. Probably he was having lunch in town. Likely enough he'd be in in a little while.

She'd bought everything she could think of for Gwendoline Anne and though she'd never had any real intention of getting stockings there wasn't anything left to do but find a line of Nylon-buyers and get in it. She'd not stood there for ten minutes before she got so nervous she had to ask the woman behind her to hold her place while she made a phone call. Still no Booker. She got out of line twice which made the woman behind her pretty cross, but before she found Booker at home she had got both ticket and stockings.

"I'm awfully sleepy," Booker said. "I'm going out to a party tonight. I think I ought to get a little nap."

He sounded strange and distant as if he had already been asleep for a while and were speaking to her from some faraway dream.

"Oh, Booker, come along."

"Well . . ." he said doubtfully.

Perhaps it was only his shyness in the face of this great and unexpected thing that made him hesitant.

"I'll meet you at four-thirty," she said and she named a bar.

"I really don't think . . ." he began.

"Oh, come on, Booker. It will be fun. Do something a little irregular once in a while. It will make you feel better."

"Well . . . well, all right." He sounded very reluctant.

She imagined the party business was really something he'd just dreamed up for an excuse. She went into a department store washroom and cleaned her face and put on fresh makeup. He felt guilty too, she supposed. Probably he didn't quite trust himself alone with her. There were a dozen things to account for hesitancy. Fear of coming combined with wanting to come, the surprise of being offered a chance he had not expected and being unprepared, dismay of that coupled with the pleasure. She combed her hair and studied herself in the mirror. Probably he would be a little late too.

But when she got to the bar he was already there, sitting at a table near the front with a drink before him. His face was rather severe looking and his smile of greeting was a bit perfunctory.

"Here I am," he said.

"Oh, it was sweet of you to come, Booker," she said, trying hard to pull him up out of the murky pool of his conflicting emotions. "I just need a gay little moment to freshen me up. I was all tuckered out with my day."

"What will you have to drink?"

"Manhattan," she said and she pulled off her gloves, patted her hair and began fishing in her bag for cigarettes.

The waitress was nowhere around so Booker had to go to the bar for her drink. They would sit for a while and chat, she thought. She didn't want to begin on anything serious or disagreeable right away. That uncomfortable look on Booker's face was really wonderful. Probably she ought to make some kind of excuse for calling him up. "I suppose you think it's funny my calling you instead of Herbert," she might say, but that would land her in the middle of business right away, and she really did feel tired. She really did want, now she was here, to have a few charming and restful moments of chatter. After all any kind of excuse would sound a little coy. She really didn't feel up to making the suitable gestures that went with it.

"Oh, Booker, Booker," she said as he put her drink in front of her, "I do feel so wonderful." Well, that didn't sound quite right either. Booker blushed and swallowed his drink. It was amusing to see him blush.

"And how is Gwendoline Anne?" he said.

"I've been buying her a lot of underdrawers," she said. "She's clear through her present ones. I do hate to see a child in holey drawers, don't you?"

But Booker was silent and when they had finished their drinks he looked at his watch.

"Oh, get some more, Booker," she cried.

She was enjoying his lack of ease tremendously. She watched him standing at the bar while he bought the drinks. She could see his back and there in the mirror his face. It gave her the sense of knowing everything there was to know about him, this seeing him from all sides, as even he could not see himself. She did wish that she had nothing serious to say to him. She just didn't want to be harsh.

He came back with the drinks and set them down on the table. He sat down opposite her but instead of looking at her he began staring at the pianist who was making a din from the dais behind the bar. It was as if he had caught the inflection of her imagination and was somehow abashed that she should be seeing into the shadowy chambers of his heart.

"Why don't you say something?" she asked. "You're awfully silent."

"Am I? I'm sorry. I feel rather distracted. I think it must be a kind of off day with me."

"Is there something worrying you, Booker? Are you depressed? Tell me what's wrong."

He shook his head and gave her a little smile.

"I don't know what it is," he said.

"Are you lonesome?" she asked. She let her naked hand fall on the bare table between their glasses. "You must be rather lonesome. A man your age, living alone. It must give you the doldrums once in a while."

He looked at her uncomfortably.

"Oh, no, I really like living alone. I'd hate having somebody else fussing around."

"But Booker . . ." she said, staring into his face.

Yes, yes, she could understand his embarrassment. He wanted to talk to her, of course; he had a hundred things to tell her, but this lovely thing had come so quickly he hadn't had time to prepare himself. If he had arranged the meeting himself it would have been different, but as things stood he was all at sea. Herself, she felt infinitely strong. She had done all the fixing, had everything in her own hands.

The noise, the near-darkness of the place, the anonymity of the almost faceless and formless people that filled the long narrow room gave her a feeling of privacy in which her own identity seemed all the sharper. She seemed the only creature in the place who was alive and real, the only one, that was, except Booker who seemed quite without any power of his own; whereas she, she felt filled with power. She moved her hand a little. He was entirely in her hands, powerless.

"Yes," he said, "what?"

"Well, I don't think I ought to talk about such things really, but I've been wondering so much about you lately."

Later she would tell him what it was that had made her wonder, but not just yet.

"A man of your sort, Booker, a strong virile man like you, couldn't have got on all these years just plain alone. What have you done all these years for love, Booker? Oh, I know I shouldn't talk like that, but sometimes one does wonder about those things, doesn't one? And sometimes it's nice to talk about them. After all, why should we be always so shut up, so secretive? Why should we always just sit around having dinners and conversation about what's in the newspaper? Sometimes a body wants to talk about the real things. Don't you think so?"

He was looking away into space, twirling his glass in embarrassment. He reddened as she talked and from time to time he would give her a short glance and then turn his eyes quickly away.

She was very excited. It seemed to her that she was talking just beautifully and that any second now, any second, she would have broken down all his resistances, and that he would tell his whole story. Ah, she could almost hear the words. She felt she knew it all, knew all the shy sordid details.

"I have something I ought to tell you," he said. "I've been trying to decide whether it was wise to tell you or not. I don't know what to do, how to act that is, if I don't tell you, and I'll be damned if I know how to act if I do. Do you think you could promise not to tell Herbert, not to let him know anything about it at all?"

"Yes, I can promise that," she said and she looked right at him with all the understanding she could command. "And you should tell me, Booker. You really should."

He sighed again and looked away out of the door.

"Well," he said turning his eyes back to her, "Mrs. De Jong called me this afternoon just a little before you did."

Anna Louise winced.

"Mrs. De Jong?" she said in a surprised voice. She could feel her face clouding over. She thought a little as quickly as possible. She felt herself blushing. "What on earth did she want?" She knew that her voice sounded weak but she hoped there would be a kind of innocent surprise in it as well.

"Now look, Anna Louise, I've been thinking it all over and what I guess is you just better forget all about this. These little things happen to girls sometimes. But they blow over if you take a firm hand. Just don't think about me at all. Take a long walk or bake a pie or something and then after a while it all goes away. It's very unfortunate you having to feel this way and I know you're not to blame. Maybe it would be better if I didn't come to the house for a while. I've thought of that. But what would Herbert think? What excuse could I give Herbert? No, I really think it would be better if we all just took ourselves in hand and tried to pretend this had never happened to you."

He stopped talking for a moment and looked at her as if he were expecting some answer, but really she could think of none. She was utterly aghast. Inside she had turned all to water, her skin prickled, and she could not meet his eyes. Oh, that old terror, Mrs. De Jong. She wanted to open her mouth and rail against her, but she could not do that. She didn't want Booker to see her in an ungracious mood. But the whole business . . . how could she deny it, how tell him there was nothing to what Mrs. De Jong had said, without making herself look even sillier and guiltier than she did already? She felt so ashamed that she could not look up. She covered her face with her hands and began to cry.

Booker patted her arm.

"There, there," he said. "Often it takes a whole lifetime to find out you can't have everything you think you want. I'm not so much. You'd really not care for me at all."

But at that she only cried harder. He was being so sweet.

"Go away, Booker," she said, "go away. I can't stand seeing you any more just now."

She simply wouldn't look at him; couldn't.

He tried to pat her again, but she stamped her feet under the table and gave him such a terrifyingly determined look that he rose straight to his feet and reached for his hat.

"But, Anna Louise," he said, "will you be all right if I leave you alone now?"

She nodded her head up and down but she kept her eyes fixed stubbornly on a crack in the table.

"Tell Mrs. De Jong that's she's made a mistake, that's she misunderstood everything. Do you think you can do that? I know she'll say nothing to Herbert. That's why she called me, you know, so that he'd never get wind. He doesn't have to hear a thing."

She went on eyeing the crack.

"Will you?" he said. "Do you think you can manage it?" He spoke with a certain persistence and she knew that he wouldn't leave without a good clear answer.

"Yes," she said, "of course. I can. I will."

She didn't look up until she was certain he'd gone. She felt utterly shamed, utterly abased. She had fallen so far, from such a great height. The shove had been so unexpected, had come so suddenly. And, of course, it was Booker himself who had pushed her. Ah, that was it exactly, that it should have had to be Booker who did it. Booker was so sweet, really, and so very gentle. It was none of it his fault. Not in any way. It seemed just dreadful that this business had to rise up between them. They would never be easy together again. They couldn't ever talk together in just the ordinary way in front of Herbert and Mrs. De Jong. There was bound to be the hidden sense of strain. It would be difficult just having to be in the same room with each other.

And yet there he was just as he had always been. There was an oddness, an almost terrifying oddness about the way in which there was to be no change in the physical fact of his being there. She thought of his face and his big ears and beautiful bald spot. She thought of his stomach and his hands. They were right there still and they would be coming to visit her the way they always had. And yet somehow they had been rendered all at once completely inaccessible.

This thought occupied her all the way home, making the ride somewhat more bearable; for it seemed to her that she could never reach the end of all the strange inflections of feeling that moved within it. Why was it that all the years he had been coming there . . . five of them, just think of that . . . when he had been always so close at hand, she had never been more than just dimly aware of his existence? Then for no reason at all she had become acutely conscious of him. For weeks some odd unknown possibility had been dangling over her head. Then it was as if some invisible hand had cut the cord and the possibility had fallen and broken, revealing itself not only as something different but something already dead. Now here was Booker completely alive, yet completely cut off from her. Exactly the opposite from the beginning. Everything was different and yet nothing was changed. It was terrifying. What was real and what wasn't? And what was it made it so?

She was amazed at the way she came into the house and showed everybody her purchases and looked as natural and pleased as could be about her day's work. Yes, that amazed her. But the minute Herbert left the house to go for his paper and she was left with Mrs. De Jong things all at once put on a different face.

Anna Louise had been sitting on the floor with Gwendoline Anne, helping her with a jigsaw puzzle, but the second the door closed behind Herbert she got up and went over to her mother-in-law. She let her lips curl, looking right down into Mrs. De Jong's face with all the hatred she could get into her expression.

Mrs. De Jong straightened up. She grew tense in her chair, setting her lips and narrowing her eyes. She looked back up at Anne Louise with utter defiance.

"Mama," Gwendoline Anne said, "will you show me how this goes in?"

But neither Anna Louise nor Mrs. De Jong moved a muscle or unhooked their clinched and mutual gaze.

"Why . . . in the name . . ." Anna Louise began with tremendous and powerful pauses.

Mrs. De Jong spread her hands flat in prohibition before her daughter-in-law's face.

"Not another word," she said. "Not now and not ever."

"Grandma," Gwendoline Anne said. "Come show me how to get this little green piece in here."

"You God d . . ." Anna Louise began but before she could get the rest of the word out of her mouth Mrs. De Jong had jumped up and brushed her aside. "Mind your tongue," she snapped as she went by.

She dropped down beside Gwendoline Anne.

"It's time to put that up and go to bed," she said. She started putting the pieces into the box. Gwendoline Anne protested with screams. Suddenly, in utter distraction, she stopped messing with the puzzle, seized the child and bore her, screaming still more loudly, into the bedroom.

When Herbert came in five minutes later he found Anna Louise sitting alone in the living room, crying to herself.

"Why, Anna Louise," he said, "what ever is the matter?"

She looked at him for a moment.

"I lost my wrist watch today," she said. "I thought I'd be able to keep it to myself, but I guess I just can't."

"Why that's nothing to take on so about. There's lots more wrist watches in the world. I'll bet we could find just the best one ever, if we looked around a little."

"Oh, I know," Anna Louise said, "but I get so attached, just so dreadfully attached to things."

THE THICKET

by Ralph Gustafson

A PIECE of pipe stuck out over the sink. On the end of this was the tap. Maria looked out of the kitchen window as she turned it, letting the cold water hit the steaming dish pan. A morning haze was still on the slope beyond the chicken-coop; the thicket of trees and bushes on the hill looked blurred and impenetrable in the damp light.

Maria's mouth tightened with satisfaction as she thought of the wire fence edging the thicket. It was shorter from the road to the house through the thicket. But the fence forced people like sheep around the hill to the gate at the foot. To Maria it was proof of possession; assertion of authority over outsiders.

She turned off the faucet and swirled the hot and cold water in the pan with the dish cloth. Mr. Simpson, the neighboring farmer, had once climbed the fence; discovered her seated by the path which ran through the middle of the thicket. "Dreaming?" he had asked. Then smirked. His teeth were rotted with tobacco.

His forefinger had been torn off by the circular saw. Maria had seen it, unflinchingly—a silly red lump of flesh lying on the ground.

Sun overwhelmed the hill. The broad slope of long grass looked suddenly crisp and yellow. The thicket came into sharp focus: the six big elms, the wych-alder, the boulder. Maria thought passionately of each detail: the cache of captured sun—where the path turned farther from the road, where she sat inviolate, fiercely alone—the ferns, sensual and exquisite under her fingers; the coarse bark against her flesh; the smudge of tiger-lily pollen on her palm. It was August and the earth was heavy with ripeness.

No one used the path, and there was no one to question her authority over it. Maria's mother was dead. Her father had assumed a martyrdom which excluded her. "It isn't the same as old times," he would say. "But we must be thankful taking things as they come." Maria hated his placid acceptance of the future as the past—but she did not interfere with his memories. She looked after the house as her mother had—dishes, food on the same shelves, used at the same times. Her father was made happy.

But it was not his tranquillity, nor was it habit which caused her to continue putting the same cups on the same row of hooks in the pantry; make visitors "help clear and wash up." To Maria it was a hard clear satisfaction, subduing imagination, her own or that of others—stripping life to facts. Other people were stupid in front of facts, impotent without sentimentality to escape into. One had only to wait to be given the advantage. She despised them that people went out of their way to expose their stupidity—and with it to admit her power.

"You're a good girl to your father, Maria, and always was," Mrs. Simpson would say, "doing your duty right by others." Maria looked at her, scorning the stupid secret in Mrs. Simpson's flesh that bound her to Mr. Simpson.

Maria put the soiled dishes into the pan of water, her mind returning to the symbol of the thicket, the pool of sun, the primitive smell of green growth and soil. She read there, would read a book in an afternoon; finish it. Not let it claim her imagination, but finish it and deny it. There, security was complete. Occasionally, a team would pass along the road. But beyond the thicket, the fence.

Richard entered the kitchen.

"Hullo, Ree," he said.

Maria scraped the yolk of egg between the tines of a fork. "There's coffee on the stove if you want it."

Richard stood looking at his sister, his hips forward, his thumbs in his belt. He shook his head, partly in jest, mostly in earnest admiration. "How d'you look so pretty so early? You're an animal, Ree."

Maria instinctively diverted the phrase, deliberately broke his mood. "You shouldn't get up so late. There's cornflakes in the pantry."

Richard's exasperation was immediate. "For God's sake why shouldn't I! Except for a purpose. There's too damn many clocks in this house."

Richard's voice was slow and deep from his throat.

There used to be a warm mountain of hay in the barn-loft. It was not so long ago—when she and Richard tumbled down its slopes. She remembered pushing his head into the hay. A stalk had stuck deeply in his ear. She had had to pull it out.

Maria glanced at Richard, her mind suddenly fearful. "I'll get your coffee," she said.

"You're always doing dishes or something, Ree. Like Mom. Spoiling your hands. We've all got good hands and feet. And ears. Discriminate breeding. Always shows up in the extremities."

He took down a package from the pantry shelf and shuffled some cornflakes into a dish. "Guess I should wash up for you once in a while." A smile, careless and selfish, like a boy's, came to his mouth and eyes. He was younger than Maria.

She was proud in her possession of Richard: his eager, handsome body, muscular and graceful; the fine brown hair that was the same as hers, thick on the back of the neck. She handed him a cup of coffee from the stove. As he took it she watched for the short white scar on his wrist. When Maria was twelve she had stuck her penknife into his wrist. He had said she was pretty.

Richard swung a leg over the back of a chair, sitting down at the kitchen table. "God, sometimes I wonder too why I don't get up!" he said. He slopped some cream into the dish, then shook a spoon of sugar over it. "Light's best in the morning. There'd be something to it if I had a girl to keep me there."

Maria replied quickly. "There's no reason to get up if you don't want to." She poured out the pan of dirty water, letting the sink-hole suck it up.

Richard spoke between mouthfuls. "Do the knives and forks first. Catch the egg-yolk before it hardens. Like water-colors, something. What a dishwasher I'd make."

Maria refilled the pan with clean hot water. The sun had reached into the whole acre of hill; white fragments of cloud had gathered over it. She gazed out of the window, her head back slightly. She would go to the thicket this afternoon. Now it was over; the harsh intolerable moon-blood.

"I'll paint you, Ree, like that." Richard laughed self-consciously. ". . . When I'm up to it."

Maria lowered her head, spoke each word deliberately: "With my hands in dish-water?" The water in the pan was too hot. She put her hands into it.

Richard swallowed coffee, pursuing his own thoughts. "You're too good to mess up. Did you ever try to paint the perspective of a nose? But I could manage the color . . . I'd get the color all right. It's the goddamned anatomy." His voice became swift with rebellion. "How the hell can you expect to do anything in this place."

Maria's fingers clutched the cup she held.

That spring, Richard had painted the hill behind the barn. The hill's four colors; the crucial shadows near its edge; the barrier of the thicket. He did it unaware. But it was true.

To Maria, it had been as if she had suddenly faced herself, seen in the picture's opposite, her own image, desolated, dispossessed. Without warning, the painting faced her with the poverty of facts without imagination, of possession without creation. In a morning Richard had achieved possession more profound than all her passionate accuracy grasped at. His unassumed mastery compelled surrender.

Maria had flushed with anger. Her hand held the palette-knife she had taken to clean. What if she plunge it through the painting, slash its reality, its usurping colors? Richard would have stupidly acquitted her authority—with bewilderment, faith, then humor.

"Is it really good, Ree?" he asked.

Her anger subsided. In her imagination, Maria saw the painting before her destroyed, its rags of canvas nailed to an oblong of kindling-wood, mocking her. Her relaxed fingers felt the sweat between their skin and the knife-handle.

"Yes. It's good," she replied.

Her impulse had been banal. The reality, the beauty was in Richard, unobtainable, indestructible.

In a rush of affection, Maria put her arm around Richard. "Oh it is good, Richard!"

Richard looked hard at the picture, embarrassed. "It isn't *that* good . . . It's yours as much as mine, Ree. If it weren't for you I'd never have *seen* it!"

Yes. If it hadn't been for her Richard would never have seen it. Later perhaps—in his stumbling spontaneous way he might have. But not now. Not while he was with her, dependent, while he was alone in himself.

Since childhood they had lived together on the farm. Whenever he had been hurt, Richard had come running to Maria for comfort, for understanding if he had been wilful. Their mother's death had bequeathed all Richard's gentleness, extravagant affection to Maria. She knew that she held an ideality for him—a confusion of boyhood dreams, sensitivities that artistically pleased him, common characteristics which served his humor. In his sister Richard found his own vitality, his ambitions, and in her recognition of them was drawn close.

Now, as Maria listened, in the kitchen, to Richard, she heard his impatience, his maturity.

"How the hell can you draw if you can't see it?"

"I bought you the bottle of turpentine you wanted," she told him.

But she had not checked his aggression. "That girl next to Dad's stall at the market. Enough flesh—yet bony enough. Do you think she'd model? Enough sex in it to make me draw with guts. Solid." He was absorbed for a moment, then looked up at Maria. "Would you ask her, Ree?"

"No."

The word escaped her. It was subjective, too taut.

She had seen this new girl, next to her father's stall. She had known the attraction which the girl would hold for Richard—knew by an intuition that equalled the weeks of Richard's evolving emotion.

As she had watched Richard split a log with one stroke, achieve a line with brush and color in unconscious freedom, so she had stood, a year ago, in the barn listening, tense and deliberate, listening to his lovemaking in the loft above—her mind quickening with liberation and derision. She had then been filled only with pride. It was natural to their flesh, Richard's and hers. It was power. Others were pleased to be made beggars. She had watched Phyllis, the neighbors' girl, ask Richard with her body. Crudely obvious; powerless against her own vulnerability; then abandoned. Maria remembered how the sun in the barn had run like liquid fire down the prongs of the pitchfork.

With Richard it would be romanticized, done under a self-induced blind of love. Maria resented only his obtuseness—the cheap belief that consummation could be claimed through experience in a hay-loft. She had not let herself be touched, yet she knew that overwhelming passion for possession—that a man, that Richard, would sentimentalize into altruism.

Now, once more, the emotion she had felt standing before Richard's painting overcame her—her sterility before the fire of creation, even the weakening of her hold on its power through Richard. It was that. But it was now more. An alien recognition surged up within her, stirred by Richard's words; a darkness which lay deep within her slowly, irrationally exposed itself. She stood shaken by Richard's awareness of sex within her—that that which was inviolable within her could be equated with the casual in others, and therefore claimed.

Richard lumberingly rose from the table. "You sound like a prude, Ree!"

It was as if the pool of bottomless dark within her, that she knew as the crudity of the thicket, had been broken—as a stone breaks ominous water. Maria trembled in her reaction. She thought violently of the power that was hers—a waiting power which, if she willed it, could destroy Richard's ideality, submerge their lives.

Richard leaned against the sink on one arm, in amusement. "You wouldn't hire your brother a model?"

Maria answered him, unsmiling. "Yes, I'll speak to her. . . ." She let the sun glare into her eyes. She again tried to confine him, thought of her new dress whose color Richard had admired. "I'll sit for you, if you wish."

Richard responded automatically. "Never mind." Then his imagination misunderstood. He turned abruptly, feeling his cheeks redden. He escaped into anger.

"This is a hell of a place anyway. If you want to do anything."

Maria spoke quickly, possessively. "I can't spend all morning on your dishes. There's bread to make." She paused almost imperceptibly. "Why don't you speak to the girl?"

Richard glanced at Maria. "No. . . ." He turned toward the door. "I'm okay for a while." The guilt he felt was irrational to him. He looked again at Maria, but she stood by the window as before. "All I need's time," he added. "Don't worry about . . . I mean you're right, Ree. . . ." He went out the kitchen door.

Maria watched him from the window. He walked toward the road, his shoulders loose, his hands in his pockets. She had known him lift a loaded wagon while his father replaced a mended wheel.

And yet he was easily vulnerable. A word could strip his strength. His security relied on affection, his ability trusted in sentiment. To use facts was to have power. Only in that was victory possessed or defeat without reproach.

She stood before the window letting her thoughts drive through her. The sun was now high enough to flood her hands as she worked. She spread smooth a film of flour on the bread-board, then took the lump of dough from the mixer and dropped it on the film of flour. She kneaded it deliberately, formally, with her knuckles and fingers. The movement was good and the pliant dough between her hands reassuring.

Maria worked on silently at the mass of dough, occasionally lifting it, powdering flour under it from the sifter. The sun was hot across her shoulders.

The screen-door opened; Tom came into the kitchen.

"Can I come in?"

Maria moved her head almost imperceptibly, continued kneading the dough, her eyes to the board.

"Don't disturb your baking none," he explained. He leaned on the edge of the pail-closet beneath the shink-shelf, watching Maria. "Guessed you'd be doin' that," he said after a while. He spat the straw between his lips into the sink. "Come from market," he said.

Maria looked up at him. His body was lean, long, without sentiment. "Yes?"

Their words had been colorless, opaque. Maria waited.

"Saw your old man." Tom shifted his body, buttocks on the shelf-edge, weight taken on the heels. "Drove mine there."

Maria's hands went on with the dough. He had come to live on the farm down the road a year ago. A good farmer. Soil responded to his hands, his eye to the weather. The first months he had tried to make love to her. At the last haying, at noon—they had loaded the wagon together in the upper field beyond the ridge of the hill. She had laughed at him.

"Richard hereabouts?"

Maria looked at him. She despised his stupidity.

"He went out."

Tom watched the division in the V of her dress as she bent over the table. "Hot, ain't it." He smiled slowly, his teeth brilliantly white against the tanned face. He was dressed in trousers, shirt open on his chest, dirty canvas shoes.

Maria dug her fingers into the dough between her hands, feeling the dry-sticky pliancy.

Tom straightened up, came to the table. "Going into town end of week." He paused, then said, "Givin' up farmin'."

Maria's fingers hesitated. He had not told her. A sudden anger filled her. "Yes?"

She went on with the kneading. "What doing?" she asked.

"Thought I'd drop by." He moved beside her. "Say goodbye." He put his arm back of her, his hand resting lightly on her hip.

Maria's body tensed, yet she did not move.

"Going into town," he repeated. His voice was heavy, low. His body touched along Maria's. "Thought you might want to say goodbye."

The nearness of his body was contemptible, but she felt herself controlled by a force new to her—an emotion which was cumulative and which neither her independence nor pride would challenge, a will, flooding to the full, a will to destroy the part of her that despised, to let her strength be violated.

He pressed closer, his arm around her so that his hand cupped her breast.

Maria stood rigid.

"Don't."

His hand pulled at the V of her dress. "Why . . . why not?" His breath was hot near her ear. "You want it—don't you? You go to the thicket, don't you?"

Fury scalded through her. She pulled against Tom's strength, but her effort found nothing—nothing was there, was real but the swirling flood within her, the blackness she had made within her. She desired only his strength, felt only greed for the freedom of defeat.

Then she felt his strength, his weight withdraw. He let go. Unbalanced, she fell back until the table she struck jammed against the stove.

She saw, blankly, Richard's fist smash up under the bone of Tom's jaw.

Tom lurched sideways onto his knee and arm. His head struck the iron edge of the sink.

Maria watched—watched the blood come on his temple, slide stickily into the corner of his mouth.

He leaned against the sink, gasping, his tongue licking at the thickening blood.

Standing over him, Richard turned his head to his sister. "Are you all right, Ree?"

Maria waited—until the blackness within her coagulated. Then turned on Richard.

"Idiot!" she breathed. "You idiot!"

STRANGER IN OHIO

by Bernice R. Evans

I

Mrs. Cooper chose the breakfast room with its bay window and bracketed flower pots along the walls, to have her talk with Frances. It was usually sunny, with a fine view of lawn, of sidewalk and the neighbor's front yards. It presented her with a full view of the street, the corner letter-box, the daily resurgence of a small town's children and their grown-ups. It afforded her a great deal of pleasure, and a feeling of permanence which gave her pleasure, and the fact that she did not have a great feeling of safety was merely because she had nothing to feel safe from.

Yes indeed, she thought, unwinding a brand new skein of fluffy golden wool, it was nice to know that these alternately brown and white clapboard houses and wide streets under the elms had been standing for a pleasant century, could go on to other centuries. Nice to know that year in and year out children got up to go to school in the morning, the neighbors went downtown to business and that the neighbor's wives tuned into a program advertising soap and opened their windows wide to air the bedding. That there was always stuffed turkey, holly, or church, at the appropriate season.

Yes indeed, she thought, and saw it for the first time like a pattern. She thought that if Frances could see it as a beautiful pattern, if she could slip into the rhythm of the life here she could also slip into happiness.

"Yes dear, hold it tight," she advised, pulling the skein of wool over her cousin's hands and thinking explicitly for the first time in years and years, "How happy I am," and that she would hold it tight—this rhythm, this pattern, this life.

She had called Frances in here on the pretext of unwinding wool—just as she always called her children into the breakfast room for false reasons, to discuss something potentially unpleasant—for Frances was full of a brooding discontent and she felt that something should be done about it. Though what was to be done Mrs. Cooper did not really know. They had burned all the girl's bridges behind her—and with the way things were these days one could not send the girl back.

"You know dear," Mrs. Cooper said, her eyes on her revolving hands, "Grandmother Mohr had a lovely house on the river, on—it's near the street that goes down to the river. I can't remember the name of the street, somehow. The house is vacant now, I *think*."

It was not like Mrs. Cooper to come to the point—ever. Vagueness was hers and she followed the path of indirection to perfection. It was part of her charm, with which she had worked miracles. Only she could perform no miracle with Frances.

Mrs. Cooper's soft lips tightened as she glanced at Frances who sat face to face with her, a red-haired, green-eyed presence unwinding wool, an unalterable presence in her breakfast room who did not react to her soothing touch and reassuring manners. She thought of Cynthia crying. Cynthia had quarreled with her fiancé because of something Frances had said. She did not understand how Frances had come to mix into their affairs like that. Cynthia had gone around all day with red eyes and a swollen nose.

Mrs. Cooper leaned forward to straighten the skein on Frances' hands. "I must show you the picture of the house when Grandmother Mohr lived there. It looked quite different—"

She stopped to watch the postman in the faded grey-blue of a civil war uniform come around the corner to collect the mail. She wondered if it was warm enough to open the windows. There were lilacs in the garden but it was still chilly.

"You must show me how to make a sweater like yours, Frances. You have the loveliest sweaters."

"I prefer the patterns here," Frances said in her definite way. "Much simpler."

"Lovely. Well—yes dear, Grandmother Mohr lived in that house for almost twenty years. I remember that she never spoke a word—" It suddenly struck Mrs. Cooper as questionable that Grandmother Mohr refused to speak German. For some unknown reason she had rarely uttered a word of her mother tongue from the day she had set foot in Ohio, though she never tired of describing Vienna as a perpetual court ball, a sort of carnival town with marvelous bake-shops.

"It must have been beautiful. I always told Dad we should have made a tour."

"Where?" Frances asked.

"Wien! It must have been beautiful. Gay. Gay memories are like treasures, I always say, something to save up for a rainy day."

"That was when mother was a girl," Frances said in her accented, ascending English, smiling a little. "It really is different now."

"Of course. I only knew it the way Grandmother Mohr saw it. Isn't that curious though? Grandmother Mohr saw the queen once. She was a real beauty, I think, and when Grandmother Mohr heard that she had been murdered—" Mrs. Cooper came to a full stop. "They certainly go in for murder on a grand scale over there," she thought.

For some reason she remembered an argument her husband and son had had shortly before they had received word that Frances was being sent to them. Dad had been coming home for years with dreadful stories about the Germans and making speeches about mankind. He was willing to pay ransom money, bonds, titles, anything in the world to loosen their clutch on a person, an animal, a piece of property.

"All we have to do is evacuate Germany and time will take care of the rest," he would chortle.

Harvey who rarely opened his mouth except to croon, or chant, suddenly asked, "What makes you think everybody is dying to come over here?" Dad had looked at him in hurt surprise.

She remembered the month they had spent in New York. All that red tape, the expense—the time. It was July and terribly hot. They had had a good time, but she decided privately that she did not like New York. All the time she was in New York she never really felt clean. But Dad was in his element, making friends as usual, with everybody from bus boys to the manager of a night club. He loved to ride on subways, and once they had been dreadfully lost in the colored section of town. He was friendly with one of the immigration officials so that they were able to skip a lot of the red tape. One of the inspectors went on board as soon as the ship docked calling "Franziska Mohr! Miss Franziska Mohr being called for," producing her for their convenience like a neat little package done up in a big red bow.

"A redhead!" Dad exclaimed, laughing. He was delighted. She was somehow quite different than they had expected.

Mrs. Cooper remembered how touched she had been when the girl had dropped her a curtsy. Like a child in dancing school.

"What a perfectly lovely custom," she said with pearly tact, trying to tell the girl that one did not curtsy in America.

They made a point of seeing New York all over again, but the heat continued doggedly and they felt like a hot pulp. The girl wilted and faded before their eyes. They were a little worried over the deathly whiteness of her face, but she explained that she had been very sea-sick. They were all sick from the heat and Mrs. Cooper decided that they had had enough. She was worried about the children. She was worried about Cynthia who had become engaged to a young architect. When they drove up to the house from the station and she saw Cynthia, in her starched linen dress with its strawberry print, when she saw her daughter running down the stairs, the tears that she had been so ready to shed at the dock in New York came into her eyes.

"Why Ma!" Cynthia stood arm in arm with Jim Nieman and bent her cheek for their kisses. "Hello Dad!"

Mrs. Cooper was so glad to get back that at that moment she forgave Jim Nieman.

"Where's Harvey?" she asked.

"Oh, he's upstairs suffering from stage-fright. We're so glad you came, Franziska." They shook hands formally. Mrs. Cooper was relieved that the girl did not courtsey to Cynthia.

"The baggage can go into my room," Cynthia said holding the screen-door open for Jim. "I thought my room would be nicer after all that traveling in stuffy rooms, and all that—" Cynthia said under her breath as her mother passed her with surprised eyebrows. "It's the only room where you can look out on our willow."

"Why dear, how lovely of you, how perfectly sweet." Mrs. Cooper's heart expanded with a powerful sense of well-doing, derived, strangely enough, from her own Cynthia and not the orphaned cousin. Then Harvey appeared in the hall, grinning.

"Whose skis?" he demanded immediately.

Later she made Harvey come over and be properly introduced. "I want you two to be very good friends. Harvey's eighteen now, too, you know."

"I'm seventeen, Ma."

Cynthia took Frances up to her room calling her attention to the willow in the garden and her genuine bird's-eye maple secretary. The skis were stowed away in back of the closet. Harvey talked about them a great deal at first, but they remained in the closet collecting dust.

Mrs. Cooper thought it would have been more appropriate for Harvey to be good friends with Frances instead of Cynthia. Instead of which they were always quarreling. Though Harvey was always one to go off by himself and he refused to speak plain English so that half the time Frances could not understand him. But she could not understand Frances' fascination for her daughter.

Cynthia said, how lucky, now that she and Jim had decided to get married next fall, how lucky that Frances was here—to make up for her leaving them. She was such a help in the house and knew all sorts of things that she, Cynthia, was always too lazy to learn.

All that hot summer and long fall Frances had seemed to be waiting for the winter and her face took on a glow as the days grew cooler. She had seemed to count on the winter. But it was late in coming and then only one snow-storm, though it was bitter cold. And now that it was spring again she was looking like a wraith—her cheeks so white, and this time it was not sea-sickness. Mrs. Cooper wished that she would pick up her work at the high school and felt a little guilty that she had not urged her to go back more strongly. She had enrolled for English and typewriting and then had left for the most inadequate reasons—Mrs. Cooper did not remember what they were. After she had bought her a typewriter, too.

She thought, Perhaps I have been blind. Frances was so good about the house, and the days just slipped by. She was more helpful than the children, but staying in was not good for her. She was too touchy with Harvey. Only last night Harvey had given her a playful little push over some foolish thing and Frances had screamed her head off, screamed that he had struck her, that she would tell his Dad he was a bully.

She had done nothing of the kind. But the unpleasantness was in the air.

"You know dear that our neighbors, the Coxes, are the oldest family in the county?" Mrs. Cooper asked, dropping the subject of Grandmother Mohr's house by the river. She thought that Frances colored slightly, drawing her lips into a thin line, but then she was distracted by the sight of Mrs. Ferragil's boy, Waldo, limping around the corner and sneaking up the walk like a grey alley cat.

For the life of her Mrs. Cooper could never figure out how Waldo managed to reach home ten minutes ahead of all the other children when they all left school at the same time. It puzzled her—irked her—that he should always get here ten minutes before the others, noiseless and solitary, and always disreputable looking, with torn pants, scratched and dirty. Exactly like a homeless tom-cat. There was a boy she heard the children talk about who flew an old crate of an airplane he had made in his own back yard—

I have a queasy, wandering, useless mind, Mrs. Cooper thought suddenly, seeing herself with heartless clarity, inwardly delighted with herself. She tried hard to get back to the subject of happiness, the rhythm of life in America, and Cynthia and Frances. But it was impossible for her to come to the point. To come out with what was in the back of her mind:

Frances, surely you're not jealous of Cynthia?

And Frances looking straight at her: *I, cousin Harriet? Jealous?* In that faintly sarcastic, thin-lipped German way of hers. Austrian way. There was a difference.

Was there?

"Frances, if your arms are tired I'll take the skein for a change and you can wind." She leaned forward and slipped the wool off her cousin's outstretched hands.

II

Across from her Franziska—Frances now—sat thinking that it was spring again, thinking of the seven little parks, the pride of Baden, thinking how the rivulets in the valley must have broken through the ice and were free to flow once more. They ran like silver ribbons over the sulphurous pebble beds. She recalled the chestnut trees, the poplars, and all the fruit trees standing against the sunny side of the yellow chalk cliffs. The lilacs grew in aisles in the gardens, in the parks, and they cultivated them in the vineyards.

"Herrgott," she sighed.

There were two robber castles, each on its own cliff. They had eyed each other across the valley for centuries, mirrored one another's dissolution, crumbling to ruins. There was nothing there now but an empty frame, jagged pointed walls. Rubble and dust was all that was left: castles Rauheneck and Rauhenstein.

A voice had come over the radio one day announcing that all the trees in Austria were being cut down. "They are cutting down all the trees in Austria," said a quiet voice into the air, and now it came unbidden over and over again, though she shut her mind against the pictures those words made.

It was impossible to picture the Valley of Helena without trees. Impossible to picture Austria without trees.

Austria bare.

But the quiet voice returned, it wove itself in and out of her dreams, became one of many voices to be heard while she lay awake at night, to be heard at the crack of dawn—anytime. It was constantly in the back of her mind now, like the fire. Like the Plague Pillar that stood at the base of Water St. near the Kaiser Karl Platz, in the town of Baden by Vienna. The Plague Pillar reappeared, slender and tall, with its stone figures twisting and turning and spiralling till they reached the sky. When she was a child she thought the monument touched heaven.

There had never been a Black Plague in Baden, the monument had been put up in thanksgiving—or for a charm. But Frances kept seeing the city as if there had actually been a pest, it kept coming back to her in a state of chaos and fear and she could actually remember the king's horsemen riding in the night, riding like mad to close the town gates, and she could remember the deep pits where they buried the dead. Ever since she and her mother had gone to live in Vienna with their cousins she could hear the bells of the convent ringing in warning, and in death, as they had never rung during her lifetime.

They had a little cubby-hole of a room in Vienna, looking out into a dark court, and she always felt as if she were in a pit trying to get a glimpse of the sky instead of up on the fourth floor. She knew that it would be a good thing if she were allowed to go up into the mountains as she had done every year, that if she could walk in her beloved mountains, just walk and walk, her head would be cleared of this ringing, this night.

"If I could go up to Snow Mountain, Mother—"

Her mother, bending over the table where she cut dress patterns, told her with a mouth full of pins that she was asking too much of life, that she was ungrateful to the cousins. But later when they had gone back to Baden she saw the Plague figures everywhere, they came down off the pedestal and began to walk about the cobbled streets. She saw the pest everywhere as though she were one of the strange hooded figures of warning, as though she were racing to the city gates. The night-wind cut into her eyelids and she could feel it lift the ends of her hair. Only later there was someone else, some black-hooded figure on horseback trying to block her path. His very appearance was like a menace to her safety, she never looked into his face or looked back. If she had she would have been lost, she would have had to turn back and the gates would have closed on her forever. And she never knew whose face was beneath the hood—the face of doom or something else.

But that was not till she and her mother had gone back home.

They had gone back home. They had returned, very much like criminals, taking every precaution not to be recognized, prepared for anything. They went on Tuesday because there was no market that day. They went to Anton St. because they did not know anyone on Anton St. Because their old servant, Maria Theresa, did not know anyone on Anton St.

It was an assignation.

"Ach Herrgott, ach gnadige Frau," Maria Theresa whimpered when she saw them. She did not fall in step with them but walked a little ahead so that to a stranger it would seem as if she were merely passing by. She had a bundle wrapped in a newspaper under her arm.

"Control yourself," Frances said severely under her breath. "Tears never did anyone any good."

"Nothing is the same—everything has changed."

Maria Theresa told them that part of their house had burned down. "The parlor and the workroom are completely gone—the fire started in the workroom. In the papers on the desk, I'm sure," she said looking backwards reproachfully at Frances. "All the papers. It was a gang of hoodlums from Mödling who did it. The police know and they don't do anything—" and her red-rimmed eyes looking reproachfully at Frances said, "And you know, too."

"Mödling," Frances's mother gasped. "We don't know anyone in Mödling who would do that. I don't believe it."

"Come along, Mother."

Maria Theresa whispered in a trembling voice, "Oh Frau Mohr, there are bad things in this town. Fires burning at night on the hill. All the glass in the loggia is broken," she said, "and the weather vane. The cock's head is gone."

Her father's house had been set back from the street, a little low too, so that it was completely hidden by the fruit trees along the fence. Many people were surprised there was a house there at all. It was under the chalk cliff that led to the old robber castle in the Helenenthal, and all the houses along that street were set back like that with sunken gardens at the foot of chalk cliffs. Only their roof had a red rooster on an iron spike that Frances' father had made out of fruit wood and painted red. One could see it a mile away.

"The cock's head is gone," Maria Theresa said. "One of these nights they will burn down the whole hill with their crazy fires—"

She remembered that Maria Theresa had thrust the package wrapped in a newspaper under her arm and slipped away. It contained a sponge cake and a Dresden figurine that used to hang on a tiny gold chain in the parlor, a court lady in pink paniers on a gold swing: the most beautiful object in the world to Maria Theresa. Frances wondered whether she had gone into the burning house to save it.

She remembered that Maria Theresa had gone quietly away, and how she and her mother had walked quickly over the square, and how she could feel the unevenness of the cobble stones through her paper-thin shoes—their hurrying to get to the trolley before they were recognized, past the cafés with their plate glass fronts where she could see the old men nodding over the daily papers. Her mother was crying to herself, but she kept saying over and over again, "How dared they, how dared they!"

She lay in the deep well of her room in Vienna and it was as if she had seen the whole town in ruins. It was as if she had fallen back and back—for Baden was as old as Rome—as if she were walking through the streets of the town in another era, though she recognized every house, every stone. The convent bells were ringing like mad, "The pest is come, is come, is come." As she had seen it in some old pageant, in an old yellowed woodcut, the king's messengers fled through the town carrying streaming torches of fire. They ran on felt slippers, silently, and their torches cast a dull red reflection in the huddled streets. She was there too hurrying, she did not know where, masked to the eyes against the pestilential air. Against the dark presence of the horseman who beckoned her to return, whose face she was so afraid to recognize. Dusky fires burned beside the pits and wayside ditches where they piled the dead. The night was dotted with moving fires, reeling pinpoints of light like a million fireflies—

Phantoms out of nowhere.

Only the Plague Pillar was a reality.

Little girls in Baden used to pass the monument on the Kaiser Karl Platz on their way to and from school. They would play beside its fountain and in the old days the hucksters would water their horses there, below the statue to commemorate their escape from the Black Death.

"Children, this was built in thankfulness to the dear Lord because he did not let the pest come to Baden. It came to Vienna but never touched our town." Little girls with blonde braids down their backs looked at the slender column with its writhing figures, to the sunburst of stone at the top. Looked with limpid eyes up to the top, as their teacher told them to, past gabled roofs where the crown of thorns pricked the sky, where the starving sparrows fought each other like beggars: for crumbs.

But the charm had not worked.

Cousin Harriet let the wool sink into her lap and was looking dreamily out of the window. Some little boys came up the street kicking a football in front of them. Two little girls went up the walk next door and slammed their door. At the sound Cousin Harriet lifted her arms and sat up as though called to attention.

She said, "Dear, I wish you hadn't dropped out of high school last term. It could do you a world of good, and here you are a regular Polly-sit-by-the-fire." She stretched out her hand with the wedding ring deeply bedded in her finger and touched the wool. "From Mother Goose, you know."

"Oh no, Cousin Harriet," the girl said, profoundly annoyed.

They used Mother Goose for a text at the Lyceum; probably still did. They would chant the jingles in a shrill chorus of school-girls' voices, in a singsong of strangled English, and then diagram the sentences. They even asked each other questions about them. *Vas* it not a peety vat day did to poor R-r-robin? Is it not a *peety*?

Her father had been furious when he found that they recited lessons in unison and out loud. He wrote a long report to the newspapers. "We are a hundred years behind the times. In the school rooms the children chant their lessons like acolytes in a medieval monastery."

The Lyceum was housed in an old convent off the narrow twisted Wassergasse. The English class was held in one of the front rooms facing the street and in the spring when the windows were opened anybody passing could hear the noise they made studying out loud.

Frances never liked to think of the old convent school with its long stone corridors and the chilly rooms that were always a little dark. There were stories that the corridors were haunted by a white sister who had died for love. The White Nun. Belief in her was revived at least once a year. The directress coldly discouraged this sort of thing but there was always someone who managed to see her figure lurking at the end of a corridor. She always had a beautiful face and carried a lantern.

Frances did not like to remember her room teacher with her sparse knot of yellow hair and the glasses that pinched the sides of her nose, marching them down into the cellar where they did gymnastics: once a week. The cellar walls exhaled dew. The teacher took off her glasses and her blouse so that her thin shoulder blades stuck way out of her coarse camisole and petticoat, and she had to squint to see whether the girls exercised according to regulation. Her blue skinny little arms were covered with goose-flesh and two flaming dots appeared on either side of her nose. They would bend and stamp in time to her count. One, two, —one, two. At the beginning of each term the entire class was invited to Ellchen Wieland's house where the wine presses and great oak vats stood in the courtyards and they were treated to huge mugs of cider. In the winter they would visit places of historical interest—"Children, behold the Pest Pillar erected by Stanetti from designs by Altomentes in 1714 to thank God for saving us from peril"—and in the spring they always made an outing over the countryside to find the first violets and learn about the trees and flowers of Austria.

Only that was long ago. Nowadays there was a tranquil voice that kept saying, "Soon there will be no trees left in Austria."

Is it not a peety? Is it not a peety vat dey did? sang the voices of a hundred girls. How angry her father had been! And how she had always hated to go to school. For always there was this tremendous desire, this pull to go up into the mountains. Her father used to tease her, calling her more Gemsbock than girl, and her mother used to call her my Wildling, my Wild One.

No one could ever known how she loved them—old Edelstein, Snow Mountain, the ugly pock-marked Rax. It was almost a superstition with her, this feeling of kinship with the mountains. It was as if they told her something; coming up against their granite sides, bruising herself whenever she climbed, made everything else seem terribly easy and terribly tame. They had a certain power over her—sometimes in the black whirl that went on inside her head the Snow Mountain would rise before her, when she found herself alone, and terror-struck, she would suddenly see the Snow Mountain and its promontory like a sharp-edged blade hanging thousands of feet above the country, and all the darkness vanished.

She smiled a little remembering the ski-run in Semmering. The great drop half a mile down the perpendicular hill that shone like polished glass. It made her hold her breath to think of it now. She had been wild to try it, but there had been a crowd that day, and somehow, with everybody cheering and watching it had seemed quite easy. She could see the faces on either side of the wooden ramp—the face of Andreas von Hofmeyer among them looking at her obliquely, watching her out of the corner of his eyes, the sudden flash of admiration with which he turned to her when she picked up her poles and went to stand at the top of the slide.

She could have been a great woman skier.

She had won her first medal that Christmas holiday—the day her father had been killed. On a cold snow-silent day. Her first and last medal.

For a minute her hands worked furiously winding the fluffy wool into a ball. For a minute she could see the dark face of Andreas von Hofmeyer as he stood watching her that bright morning, with that trick of being able to call up the past she could see him standing there, and her eyes were like green stones of poison.

For a minute she saw the dark face and then she saw the lilacs shivering in the window and the low horizon where the new high school encroached on the fields at the edge of town—the continuation of the flatlands.

"Oh, no," she thought, "they cannot expect me to get used to this. Not this." She told Harvey it was like being on a dead sea. He whistled incredulously. He often sang mountain ballads beating time with his hands, veined, long-fingered hands, that seemed strangely archaic attached to his lanky mid-western frame. His voice too, coming out of his rugged frame, was singularly soft and sweet. "She'll be comin' round the mountain when she comes," Harvey sang, strumming the air with his fingers. What mountain? Frances always asked. What mountain? The Blue Ridge, take your pick, the Rockies, the Smokies, take your pick, any mountain, he said. Frances said that she had ridden two days and a night on a train and hadn't even seen a good-looking hill. He began to hum the tune again.

"Where do you think this came from then?"

"Have you ever been to the mountains?"

"Nope."

"Well then—"

"Well then what?"

"Don't you ever get tired of this—this flatness. Being low?"

"Did you ever see a dream walking? Well I did," Harvey sang softly into her ear.

"You might as well be at the bottom of the sea," she said angrily.

"You might as well be dead," she told herself staring out the window to where the Coxe's house stood with its wooden turrets and voluminous porches. They had a forsythia bush in each corner of the lawn and a tall Carolina spruce guarding the middle. Beyond, at either end of town, the corn fields spread out for miles upon miles. She never could get used to it.

She remembered that lying in her berth the morning after they had left New York she had seen the vacant sky and felt the vibrations from the wheels and thought she was still on the steamer and had only dreamed the rest. Later they changed to a local train and rode out through plains wide as the sea, past lonely farms, and every half hour lonely dried-out woods. A terrible pang went through her when she realized that it was to be like this all the way—that there were to be no mountains—no valleys.

If she had known the last time she had gone up to Semmering that it was to be the last time—Well what?

She remembered that going up that week-end the air was more intoxicating and the sun and snow more dazzling than ever before. It was her first time alone except for a class-mate, Ellchen Wieland. She did not count Ellchen who sat looking into the eyes of the Falk twins not knowing that it was the most beautiful day in seventeen years.

She remembered that as the train climbed and chugged through the snow they found themselves singing. It was only the middle of the morning when they unloaded but they rushed to their hill immediately—without waiting to leave their things at the inn. It was too tempting to do anything but run out into the dazzling brightness and throw one's arms about rather dramatically, and take deep breaths of the cool glowing air. There was already a large group from Baden up on the hill who had come up on the Friday night train and they were standing around a fiercely sun-burned young man shrieking in appreciation of everything he said.

He was holding forth about God and the creation.

"And God said, let the earth be covered with layers of wet dry salt." She remembered that those had been his very words. "Let it be of the finest, the dryest wet salt. Let it taste like—"

"Confectioner's sugar," somebody yelled, and they all burst out laughing, holding each other by the shoulder and rocking back and forth on their feet.

The young man was from a village called Mödling. He was the kind of young man who went in for uniforms and he had a shady reputation because of some mix-up with Prince Stahremberg. His name was Kai-Bieber, though he was usually called simply Bieber. Frances turned her back on them and knelt to fasten her skis. The hill was swarming with children and tourists. She was on her way to the ski-jump when she met Andreas von Hofmeyer. From the village of Mödling.

Von Hofmeyer was coming up with a child's painted red sled. "There ain't a damn toboggan in the whole place," he said cheerfully. "They rent them out Friday night and you have to steal one if you belong to the Saturday crowd." He looked down at the little red sled laughing.

Frances slid her skis up and down. "Isn't it awful?" She pointed to the gayly sweatered figures parading over the hill. "Full of Hungarians." And then she blushed for she really had nothing against the Hungarians and had only said it because that was the way he felt about them. But Von Hofmeyer surveyed the hill coolly and then looked back at her. He had beautifully formed red lips but his eyes were like those of a black cat's opening suddenly on a shaft of hard green light.

"You know, those bums up there won't know what to do with this," he kicked the sled contemptuously. "Let's go for a ride—it will do for us."

So she bent down again to unstrap her skis though she felt a twinge—of remorse, or disloyalty was it?—for Andreas von Hofmeyer used to strut about in a uniform, like Bieber—laced boots, brown shirt and a skull insignia. He was one of Stahremberg's boys too. The ruin of Austria.

Frances did not know Andreas very well. Years ago their parents used to stroll through the Kur Park on Sunday afternoons, and sometimes the dark sullen little boy let her sail his boat in the fountain, treating her to outbursts of domineering affection, then ignoring her completely. That was ages and ages ago. The Von Hofmeyers moved to Mödling, into a reconstructed eighteenth century villa, and never went walking in the Kur Park any more. When she was confirmed at St. Othmar's in Mödling she found that Andreas was receiving instructions too, though he was several years older. She was very shy but he always spoke to her as though it were the most natural thing in the world for them to be together, as though they had only parted company yesterday, while she looked into his light eyes, so like her own, helplessly.

Their relationship was something tenuous, interrupted, but she knew what he was—the ruin of Austria. Once turning the pages of a fashion magazine she had come across the photograph of Prince Stahremberg and entourage in Naples. The dark face of Andreas was there too, peering over Stahremberg's shoulder. He organized riots in the University class-rooms, and there were stories that he had been threatened with arrest. Instinctively she knew, just as she knew how steep the mountain was under the table of snow, and which way the wind was veering, what kind of cross it was he wore secretly—under his lapel—next to his heart.

Nevertheless she parked her skis in a drift and helped him pull the sled away from the others.

"You know," she said almost happily, "there's a road—well it's a secret —I'll show you."

She had discovered the road when she was eight and had come back to it every year, never telling anyone. She was sorry now that she had mentioned it but not for the world could she stop from telling him.

"Two roads beyond the station, perfectly flat—"

"I never knew there was anything there," Andreas said.

"Oh yes there is. You will see." She laughed with excitement, no longer sorry.

They trudged past the big hotels and the station to what looked like a path curving away from the main road. They sat on the little red sled, Andreas in the rear with his arms about her, pushing off with his foot. The path opened suddenly into a wide flat road—a level road—and they skimmed over the surface at an incredible speed, between wagon tracks though they passed no wagon or human being on the way. It went along like this for miles with a high wall of stone on one side, and a shallow drop on the other, with the usual scrubby pines sticking out of the snow. She had never come to the end of it. There did not seem to be any end or destination.

The wind rushed against her face as they gained speed, she could feel it blowing in her eyelids. After a while everything became a white whirl and she screamed. Andreas put his foot down so that the sled swerved into a drift throwing them off into the snow where they lay shaking with laughter.

"Will it work the other way?" Andreas asked turning the sled.

"No, we'll have to walk. It's uncanny isn't it?"

"Uncanny."

When they came to the little path off the main road again she stopped and looking up at him said, "Nobody knows about it. It's a secret."

"And a secret it shall remain. A secret between us," Andreas said seriously. And as if to seal the pact he bent down and kissed her, and they looked into each other's eyes.

"You—Franziska," he murmured. "Your hair is like red amber," he said dreamily.

Suddenly he blocked her path. "Listen—would you come up to Snow Mountain with me next week? I know a place below the inn for skiing. There isn't a better place in the world."

"Snow Mountain!" she exclaimed. "It's dangerous."

"Not when I'm there it isn't dangerous." He smiled triumphantly and his handsome white teeth glistened. "Not with me it isn't."

But she would not answer and went back to the hill to get her skis. She practised all afternoon and went up early to bed. Only on the way up through the main hall with its pictured porcelain stove, where the booths were set up for refreshments and the deer-heads were crowned with branches of fir, where the landlord sat toasting his feet and sucking the porcelain stem of his pipe, she stopped for a minute to say goodnight to Ellchen Wieland. There was the same crowd of the morning with the red-faced Kai-Bieber holding court, and the Falk brothers asleep, resting their heads on the table. It was a cozy world of porcelain and flaxen hair.

"They fell asleep over their dinner," Ellchen giggled. And then she said, "Do you know each other? Ziska Mohr from Baden—Bieber?"

"Fraulein Mohr from Baden," Bieber stated rather than asked, pushing a glass beer-mug towards her. He was amusing himself by forming little figures out of match sticks, giving them the names of popular musical stars and repeating or making up scandal about them. "Why does Lucie Keno take the seven-fifteen every morning from Baden to Vienna?" he asked in a voice of such pristine wonder that the others began to laugh and the Falk brothers smiled in their sleep. He began to walk Lucie Keno to the trolley when he stopped short, staring keenly at Frances. His eyes held no trace of humor. "The name Mohr rings a bell in my dumb head—well-trained dog that I am. Did she say that the little person came from Baden bei Wien?"

"I didn't say Berlin," Ellchen smiled.

"There's a certain Mohr, a certain person in whose company I would not choose to be seen, and that goes for that certain person's child too." He brought his hand down on the table with a bang, scattering the match sticks in all directions.

Ellchen gave a nervous little laugh but Frances said sharply, "Well then you can get up and leave," her face turning red from the strain of holding back her tears.

That old story, she thought. They never forget, do they? They cherish all the things that hurt them—stored them up—remembered. Fifteen years ago her father had lampooned the clericals. It *was* fifteen years ago, she thought. Two priests with a bishop's mitre, full of blood, between them: "Brother Leech there's more life to be found in the alleys back of the Stefan's Dome than any place else in the world. In the name of the Father, the Mother, and the Holy Ghost." "Brother Leech, I beg to disagree. City folks are apt to be anemic these days; it's much better beyond the Wiener Tor, in the name of the Father, the Mother,—"

"You can get up and leave," she said holding back her tears. But Andreas von Hofmeyer came up at that minute and Bieber moved over to make room.

"Does she want to drink with us?" Bieber said into the air. "My dear fellow," to Andreas, "let me introduce you to a certain little person. The name is Mohr. No, don't think of Schiller—that's not the idea. Does your skin crawl when I pronounce the name? You know, Mohr of the leech Mohrs?"

"Shut your mouth," Andreas said fixing his green eyes on Bieber's, holding them there for a minute, angrily. But Bieber stared back and in the end it was Andreas who turned away.

"Ah so-oo," Bieber took a long breath. "Well the sins of the fathers—" and he began to joke and make them laugh again. Once he took his beer mug and looking at Frances shouted, "Alles ist kaput, mein Kind!" Everything is smashed, my child. Broken finished, smashed! And as if to add his share he banged his mug to smithereens against the wall.

The landlord left his corner with alacrity. His cozy porcelain peace was being destroyed. "None of this!" he shouted at Bieber. "I won't have this!"

This sort of thing was so common nowadays that she did not think of it again. She did not think of Bieber till she met Maria Theresa with her mother that day on Anton St. and Maria Theresa had looked at her with eyes full of reproach, and handed her the Dresden lady on the golden swing. Only while she waited to go down the hill the next morning she saw Andreas watching her in the crowd. She remembered how he had turned away last night and a sudden uneasy flicker went through her. It was as though the granite mountain-side had opened its heart to her and shown itself afraid.

in too big a hurry, he had finished everything too quickly and now he had finished himself with it. Well, that was right, he reflected, it was what he deserved. All of his life he had run from reality and now when he wanted it, when he badly needed it, it was farther away from him than ever before. There was a kind of poetic justice in the way it eluded him now, so that the unreality of his younger days was clearer to him, more real than the present. Still he did not understand it—they had made such an awful botch of it, he and Sandra.

It was hard for him to understand how two people so much in love could kick away everything, even now. Money had been part of it, of course. They said money didn't matter but they were all wrong about that. It was true that a lot was not necessary, but enough, that was vitally important; for if you didn't have enough you worried so about the money that you had no time to worry about love. You thought love would keep until you could afford it, but it didn't, and after you could afford it suddenly you didn't need it; you didn't mind it, then, that loss was gone, it was rather a relief, because you didn't have it yourself to give, when it was wanted. Suddenly love was gone in a crazy swirl of unpaid bills, too-high accounts, quarreling over pennies and dimes unwisely spent. Then when you had the money it came too late, and it was just money then—just paper. It was funny about that, he decided—how you worked so hard toward a goal that you lost sight of the purpose in the process, but momentum carried you anyhow and when you got there it was all gone. It was like casting off your pack so that you could run faster, and then finding that all the things you wanted were in the pack. Or like throwing your belongings overboard so that the boat would not sink, but when you reached the island these things were essential to your happiness, but you hadn't known that, hadn't guessed they were so important as all that. Then there had been the boredom, and the anger and the drinking and the helplessness that was worse than the other three together, until you were not two people at all but just two shells who pretended not to know they were finished already. It was little spurts of other men and other women that you both looked the other way for fear of seeing, because it didn't matter anyhow; but that last part was no pretence. It didn't, actually, and that was the worst of it. Life where nothing mattered—nothing at all—was barely worth the living, and nothing had mattered now for a very long time. Still it was not her fault, or even his—it was love's fault.

Love asks too much always; he thought—he felt angry about that. Not asks—demands. The penalty is not when it doesn't get it but when it does. That is what kills it. Like two people so much in love they wanted always to be together until they killed it by use and could no longer stand the sight of each other. Like two people who flew at each other in love and came away wearing boxing gloves, because they loved too hard. Love was a night blooming flower, but they had asked too much of it—had tried to make a tree of a tender plant, until suddenly they did not love at all. Until suddenly it was hate, then disgust, then not even that. Life goes on, he thought, when love is dead—it is when hate is dead that it stops, and you are finished. He guessed now that they were one and the same, only the rhythm was on different levels . . . something like that. . . .

He wrote, as though it were any other day. From his window he could see the little boy building a very rough snowman, and standing off to inspect it. He came whooping in the doorway for his lunch, but at sight of Charlie he was silent; he had forgotten again.

"Well, Bry—hungry?" He tried to make his voice hearty.

"Yeah."

"Well, dig in."

"I wash my hands first," the boy said.

"That's so. Where do you wash them?"

"Upstairs."

He came down solemnly, clean from the wrists down, stood for a moment before taking his seat.

"Daddy."

"Yes, sweetheart."

"Mummy didn't take her things with her. They're all in her room—I was just there and saw them."

"Why—what things, buddy?"

"All her things," he said, "you know. All the things she liked. Maybe we ought to send them to her?" He questioned Charlie with his eyes.

"Mummy won't need them," Charlie said.

"Won't she?"

"No, buddy. Mummy won't need those things where she's going. They'll—have them there, for her," he said.

"Even the rabbit?"

"What rabbit, sweetheart?"

"Mummy's rabbit—the one she liked so much. Mummy must have been in a big hurry to forget her rabbit."

"Yes, she must have." he said. It was a clasp in the shape of a rabbit, which he had given her.

"We won't—won't send it to her, Daddy?" He saw the first quiver of a lip.

"Well, maybe—maybe we will," he said, and wished he had not spoken. But the little lips were smiling now, the eyes were dancing. . . .

"And can I wrap it?" he said.

"Yes, you may wrap it."

"And what'll the address be?" The boy's eyes were bright with the anticipation of the task, and Charlie, trying to be matter of fact, said: "Well, eat your lunch, we'll do it later."

"All right. And I'll write a note with it."

"What will you say in the note?"

"I'll say—'Dear Mummy, here's your rabbit. You forgot it but—we didn't. So we're sending it to you, Brian and Daddy.'" He bounced in his chair. "I bet Mummy will be surprised—getting her rabbit—after going off and leaving it—I bet she'll be happy. . . ."

Charlie cleared off the table. The boy was knocking down his snowman in the yard, now he was building it up again. He was a tireless architect and a perfectionist, but in a little while he would remember the rabbit and come in expecting to wrap it. They would bind it tightly and Charlie would take it to the post office, and leave it somewhere along the way, but he thought perhaps he would keep the note, he would rather like to have that. Poor little tyke, he had seen the start of so many trips, he probably dreamed already of a homecoming—he didn't know about trips that you didn't come back from, he didn't know. It was so awfully difficult for a child to understand. Or for an adult, he thought suddenly —or for me. . . .

THE JOURNEY BEGUN

by Sanora Babb

DAMON SHANE came out of the shack into the dark street with the same smothered sense of excitement and special being that trembled within her every time she did this. That was the way things were with her. If she liked something or someone, there was no ebb and gradual change. Her feelings stayed keyed up in wonder and discovery and constant newness, and then one day without warning, without reason, they were gone. There was nothing left in her for that emotion, but later, a detached tenderness uncovered itself and lay in her mind like a pleasant, long settling residue. She felt old for fourteen and mysteriously wise in the sense that this would be one of the patterns of her life, as intrinsic as the symbolic design of the Navajo rug beside her cot.

Tonight though and for days past she had had a vague, uneasy warning that the pattern must be violated. She suspected a new, perverse experience, that of two equal forces within her moving steadily to an impasse, at which moment she would have to make a decision. This time her emotions would refuse to break off as ripely as a dry stalk at summer's end. She felt resentful, pressed toward a deliberate choice of which she was not capable. And yet some gathering turmoil, the tentative winds before a storm, were forcing her away from the ease of waiting for the cleavage to come of itself, without thought, without reason.

As she walked the sense of cosmic relation and imaginary destinies receded. Youngness came up in her mind like a spring from the earth, washing away the need for manipulated wisdom. She felt the warm fine dirt of the path on the soles of her feet as she impulsively ran, skipping and leaping like a frisky calf before the threat of summer lightning and the changing wind.

She liked the night and was not afraid of the dark even though in this poor street, lighted only at natural intervals by the moon, things sometimes happened. Here the spring mornings had the good smell of damp cinders and trains, coffee and weeds, and sundown had the smell of sage and prairie wind.

When she reached the main street of Happydays she hurried soberly and directly to the largest drug store. Men were standing outside in the big slabs of window light. Others sat on the curb in the dusk, their cigarettes blooming like little starry flowers.

Damon leaned against the window and pressed her cheek to the cool plate glass. The enormously fat man behind the counter saw her and smiled; behind the smile there was an admission of secret between them. His greeting suggested ever so slightly that she was early.

She was waiting to guard her father from the sheriff as she had guarded him many nights. Now, she loafed, watched the street, alert and dreamy, present and remote, at ease by herself with nothing to do.

Couples were going leisurely up and down. The wind blew down the middle of the dirt street from the west and stirred up little whirls of dust and gave the gentle night a restlessness of its own. The fragrance of the prairie was urgent, a disquieting element of the primitive spell of the plains. To Damon and the people in the streets it contained wonder. A perfectly sober man yelled suddenly, joyously, kicked up his legs and settled again among his friends with a satisfied grin. His high-heeled boots and tight pants and big Stetson hat with the carefully rolled brim made the impulsive display seem commonplace.

A very big girl who looked like a white rabbit passed with her mother. They were referred to as "the four hundred," with audible and impersonal scorn between The Twins who happened to be walking by arm in arm. The Twins were pretty young prostitutes who could not yet be identified by the practiced glittering eyes or any other marks of dissipation or taste. They spoke to Damon shyly and with subtle respect, and Damon returned their greeting. She looked at the white rabbit she had helped all year with her themes. They liked each other. Once this girl gave her a little gold heart on a chain that she had secreted from her father's jewelry store. Damon wanted to give it back but her friend had urged her to wear it inside her dress. Now, the mother who knew about the themes, and the daughter who dared to take the locket, strolled near Damon, eyed her cautiously and did not speak. The girl's hand opened and closed at her side in secret greeting. Damon blushed.

They turned to the north. There the streets were lined with Catalpa trees and the bulky houses already had a permanent look. This look of permanence frightened Damon. She sometimes dared herself to walk along these streets at night and glance into the windows. They had none of the exploring wonder of trains. When her mother was alive and they had done that once (in another town, a town whose name she could no longer remember they had lived in so many), her mother had wept in a resigned way and seemed to feel guilty. She had asked Damon never to mention it to her father. Damon had, since, with her tongue fiery and her eyes hot with accusation, but her father had shouted her down, or thought that he had. She smiled now to think that he would ever control her in any way. He had frightened her mother, but all his threats and swearing, the *hated words* and the blows could not frighten her. He did not dare to strike her the way he had struck her mother, who was dulled by acceptance. (Damon could never forget the humiliating words of her grandmother to her mother, which had ended the protest: "You have made your bed hard; you must lie in it.") It was a contest in which she would not lose and did not care to win. She wanted to be left alone.

After the slight, Damon stood firmly, proudly. Fierceness, as clean as a flame, ached along the tender avenues of her mind in loyalty to her father. She trembled a little with the emotion of the task and the beauty of the night with its mild smells and loneliness.

She turned hopefully to the window again, and this time Doc Willy smiled and lowered his head a little. Damon walked west into the clean sage-wind.

At the end of the block she turned south for the length of the building, darted into the alley and ran swiftly and softly in the furry dark. Shapes sprang out of the blackness and she could distinguish empty boxes and barrels and the usual alley clutter. Between some of the buildings there were very narrow aisles and from these shafts of dim light came through and leaned gently on the ground. Damon walked beyond their tips keeping in shadow.

Each night that her father gambled she watched at the rear of the drug store kept by the fat man, Doc Willy. Between it and its neighbor was the last finger of light. Refuse was piled high to one side blocking off the reflection. She stopped, listened. Cats moved dimly through the alley and a dog drooped along with his tail down fearfully exploring the rubbish. None of them came near precisely because they had met her in an alley. There was something elusive about her too; they suspected her. But now she stood erect and lifted her heavy hair letting the wind blow through it. She felt taller, more aware, and quite alone with the strangely blended emotion of ecstasy and sorrow that permeated her mind completely and left her feeling bodiless. She put her arms around the wind. It was strong enough to hold but it leapt away. She felt like the wind, like this clean western wind with its strength and its disturbing urgency.

Secretive noises came from the drug-store window over which a blind was drawn securely. She went as soft-pawed as a cat to the wall and listened. Chairs scraped. Steps ceased. Men's voices lowered and rose only a little when they swore in good-natured staccato. They fell again to a drone and long moments of silence, broken by the monotone of each man speaking in turn. Under these sounds was the one sound so long familiar in her ears that she could hear it when it did not exist—the quiet, even ripple of cards being shuffled expertly.

It was a harmless sound, yet she turned away in sudden distaste and sat down on the low stone curb by the door where she could watch the alley at either end. She could see clearly now in the dark. Figures passing along the street were silhouetted tellingly.

The conflict she had shed earlier sprang up with arrogant ferocity; she tried to repudiate it, to push it back into the limbo of gestation. The distaste for and the pleasurable excitement of these nights fought in her not in a quiet, thoughtful way she could perhaps understand, but reminded her only of the fury and painful howling of two cats which all along were crossed with desire and hate, a phenomenon which she had not the experience to comprehend, except as it might relate to other violence she had overheard through flimsy walls. She felt desecrated and thrust beyond her strength by some power of emotion that she wished to escape.

Abruptly she began to think of Miss Heath at school, Miss Heath who often spoke pompously but who was warm and generous with herself, inviting confidence and not betraying it. Miss Heath was always saying she was "interested" in Damon. "Because you're so bright and sensitive and kind of wild," she would say bluntly, "wild like an animal, you know, not like a girl." Then Miss Heath would blush. The last day of school, when Damon had told her she probably wouldn't be here next term (she never was), Miss Heath had hugged her and said, "Damon Shane, I know you. You'll do something with yourself." Then she had given her a rough little shove and Damon had gone off not looking back. She didn't dare.

Damon Shane, I know you. Miss Heath couldn't know she'd be sitting here in an alley doing this, and other things, and sometimes liking them, feeling thrilled even. She felt revolted and ashamed and she could imagine Miss Heath standing there in the alley looking disappointed and forgiving her. "Don't," she whispered dramatically to Miss Heath, who had begun to look pleasantly excited, "don't start telling me what I'm like. I don't know yet, but I have to find out for myself." Diffidence overcame her. Miss Heath retreated and left her alone.

But Miss Heath came back, and this time it was about the lie she had had to tell her. Of course, she hadn't really had to embroider it so, but once begun it just happened. It was about her father. Everyone, as soon as she and her father came to a new town, asked her what he did. She wanted to tell the truth and face the rest of it. But her father, who was proud and vain and lived an irresponsible, free life, wanted to pin her down to the things he hated. "You're crazy," he'd say, "you'll have me in jail! Besides, why don't you try to be decent the way I want you to be? Tell them I'm—oh, anything, goddam it! A traveling salesman of some kind, tho' that's a hell of a thing to be." His false pride would give him such a tussle that he wouldn't give in to himself until he had exhausted all the other professions that might take him out of town, or worse, keep him in it looking prosperous and not working, and somehow strangely living in a shack in *Dirty Skillet*. Damon could hardly understand the last. He scolded her if she told anyone where she lived and yet in a small town it was soon known. They owned nothing to put in a house. He forbade it. Whatever they had of necessity to put in a shack they could of necessity go off and leave. Their only possessions were stray cats and dogs and both cried to leave them.

Miss Heath had wanted awfully to know about her life at home, and even to meet her father. She had had to invent much and quickly so that Miss Heath would never visit her, and never, never meet her father. She had to save Miss Heath that. Miss Heath, so warm and lonely, would certainly have fallen in love with him as women were always doing. He told Damon about them all. She could see that he cared nothing for them and even scorned them for their feelings. And yet if they so much as smiled at another man he'd call them filthy names and drag them around by the hair of their heads. This last was a specialty. Damon had seen it. Once she saw him drag a woman across a street by her hair, and she had waited surely for it to come off her skull like a wig. Nothing of the kind happened. With Miss Heath and her short blonde curls this would have been impossible, but her father would have found a way. He would, as he had tried with Damon, to grasp her spirit as he had the hair and drag her about by it. She would have had to protect Miss Heath. Why hadn't she protected her mother? Of course, she was very young, and the only harm she could do him was to bite him on the leg. That was before she had found out actually that she was his equal. Once she had thrown a knife, not wanting to, and after that she could frighten him with her eyes and her words, the cool-hot words springing at him beautifully like a wild cat from a tree, smothering his profane, monotonous tirade of sexual insults. That part of her was in everything she was, as natural as laughter, not, as he thought, a segment he could shatter and pluck out.

Back there a man had appraised her boldly and she had stared at him with distaste. His glance lingered briefly on her face and slid surreptitiously down over her flat bosom and her long thin legs. Everything about her body was delayed, potential, but men were already looking at her in that secret, covetous way. Sometimes she looked down, but if the man were magnetic, she returned his gaze with one of subtle anger and challenge, and her eyes felt warmed and as if they were filling up with wordless meanings that could be articulated only in a beautiful, unknown way at some indefinite time. Not with this man. And not in the way her father warned which violated her more than any experience he feared. She would never scorn desire, only appetite, which she knew was not discriminating. When the time came she would tell her father that. For a moment she felt sorry for her father who must endure her rebellion and her subtler knowledge. Miss Heath was older, to be sure, but Damon felt and knew many things she did not. Her father would destroy Miss Heath. And, he wouldn't mean to, really. He would be surrounding her and possessing her and abandoning her all at once.

A big rat ran out of the dark, his claws ticking along the stone, and bumped against her bare leg. The soft impact and the velvet fur were like a fearsome caress. She leapt up and would have run into the alley but for the remembrance of what she was doing there at all. One of the cats blurred past her feet and pounced with revolting sureness on the rat, but the rat fought and in the quiet she could hear their breath and the thud of their bodies, and then the rat escaped into the narrow corridor between the buildings with the cat in swift pursuit.

Damon sat down dizzily, trembling, and started up at once, imagining other rats. The clean wind parted around her face. Quietness came back. She could hear the low voices and the flutter of cards and through the thread of light along the blind she could see the air opaque with smoke.

Her feet and legs were cold but the night was still beautiful if she could only enter it. Her father had said when she got sleepy she should go home because many times they gambled all night, and he would just take a chance after that. She made up her mind to leave as soon as the drugstore closed. At midnight every other street light would go off and she would miss the reflected light at one end of the alley and know the time.

Some nights her father came home with a thousand dollars or more, and that after he had split with Doc Willy for letting him run the game in the back of his store. In the years before there had been ups and downs, gay improvident days, hungry, uncertain ones. Before the fall school term, they would probably take a trip to Kansas City and buy some very good clothes, and her father would want her to sing and dance for his gambler friends while they drank Southern whiskey and he boasted about her mind and her independence. Meanness, he called it if he thought she was listening. Somehow that would be the end of the money; it would be lost and spent and given away. And, as occasionally happened, she might even enter her second year of high school without money to buy her books.

Always before she had performed, half in scorn of herself and half in flattered pleasure, because it pleased him so much, but this year she would not because of the new look in the men's eyes when she danced. Perhaps he had seen it too and would not ask her. It had happened first last year. Afterward she had gone back to her room in the hotel, and got her book from the bag and looked at Shelley's beautiful picture for a long time. I love you, she said. Then she took a bath, scrubbing hard all over with a thick soapy lather.

In bed she read the poems, skipping around reading parts of the long ones, and by the time she was sleepy, her thoughts were glorified. About three o'clock, the darkest and most silent part of the night, she dreamed that someone was knocking frantically and demandingly, and when she awoke the last knocking was still on the door, but it was in the dream. That was a long time ago, a year.

Heavy footsteps and whispering voices crashed into her memories. The three men were nearly upon her. She sprang up, not remembering that her bare feet touched the ground, and fled round the boxes, between the buildings. The narrow corridor was darker than she remembered but she ran in wonderful lightness and speed and excitement. Unreasonably, her mind flicked in the image of the cat just ahead waiting for the rat at a hole in the wall, waving his tail slowly and cunningly. He did not move when Damon flew past.

She reached the street in a moment, composed herself as swiftly as she had run and walked into the drug store straight to the enormously fat man. Only a few people loafed about. She looked quickly into the case.

"Doc Willy, I want—" She pointed and pushed a dime forward on the glass. His fat hand fumbled and grasped the first thing touched. He handed her a styptic pencil, and the sweat was already beading his pale forehead. "Quick!" she said low.

Damon went out slowly while the fat man waddled to the back and disappeared. She heard her father's fast casual steps and she knew the others would drift out later through Doc Willy's rooms. She walked to the corner. The street lights were going out all along the way, leaving wide spaces of dark. She cut over into the residential alleys and ran, finding the vacant lots in the blackness, running until she came alongside the box cars where the Mexican railroad workers lived by the Santa Fe tracks. She rested, hearing a guitar and a sad velvet song throbbing over her loud heart-beat. She felt intensely aware of the moment; the wind passes over this place and this time and is gone forever.

This part of town had no lights at all save the shadowed windows and dim stars of cracked blinds. The night was truly dark, but everything was familiar, every break in the paths, every rise and fall in the hard earth. She plunged into its black cave and ran again, her breath painful but the wonder of flight making her body sing.

As soon as she was in the house she drew all the blinds and lighted a lamp and waited. She heard her father's running steps from another direction than she had taken, and before he arrived she had the door unlocked, holding the knob. She let him in quickly and latched the screen and the door.

They stood there excited. He pushed his hat back and his hair was damp-dark. The pupils of his blue eyes, like Damon's, were full with the sensuous gratification of winning flight. His handsome face was alive with subtle laughter. Damon's was the same. He struck her lovingly and she struck him back and they laughed.

"They nearly got me! You must have been dreaming again!" He said it with slight accusation. "I've got to change my clothes. Get me my best suit!" He always changed his clothes as he began a new escape even when there were only moments to spare. It did not occur to Damon to wonder why. She tossed him clean underwear and shirt and handed him a tie.

"Pack my bag! See if all the dice and cards are in it. My ink outfit! Put in my best clothes. Give the rest away."

"Shut up," Damon said affectionately. "I know all that."

He was getting into his clothes with the quickness of practice, wearing his hat, tying his tie expertly with hardly a glance into the small mirror hanging on the wall.

"Listen, Queenie. We're leaving."

"All right. Good."

"I've cleaned up here. They're after me. I'll get caught."

She smiled her doubt at him.

"Well, if I stayed, I would. I've never been caught but once, have I, Queenie? Then you got me out of jail. Remember?"

"Brush your hat, Papa."

"Listen, now. I'm going to the old sod house across the line." The town of Happydays sat snugly in the corner of the state, with two state-lines near, one a half-mile away and the other seven. Either place was a safe stop-over for fugitives. "I'll lay low tonight and tomorrow, and tomorrow night, you come down. Bring the money. And, by God, don't go out and fool any of it away tomorrow. I ought to take it. You haven't any sense with money."

"Come easy, go easy, you're always saying."

"Chicken one day and feathers the next, too. Remember that. Well, that's a gambler's life," he said sorrowfully.

"You like it," she said, gathering his belongings and fitting them precisely into the bag.

"It's a goddamn hell of a life, but I like it." The pleasure came back into his face. "Hurry up!"

"I'm through. Close the bag!"

He lifted up the edge of the worn rug and a newspaper beneath and looked at the money. Damon was digging in the large flour can which was used for a stool at the kitchen table. She was trembling violently. The dreaded impasse was now. It had been closing in upon her all night like a panting hound upon a rabbit deft at escape, now cornered, forced to break into the open, to depend only upon the strength and swiftness of its legs.

"Queenie, leave this money under the rug till you're ready to leave. Don't even look at it! Somebody might see you." He himself looked at it with satisfaction. "Altogether I've got ten stakes!"

"We'll wander it up," she said.

"Well, I have to hunt chumps. What in the hell are you doing?"

She brought forward a tin syrup pail and set it down, wiping the flour off her hands.

"Here!" she said, prying the lid off. The can was stuffed with large bills. "You take this with you."

"I told you to bring it all," he said crossly. "Do as I tell you. If anything happens and you don't show up, I'll go on. Keep the money hid and I'll write you."

"General Delivery," Damon said, "that's my home address."

"You know, you need a little trimming down." The threat of violence lying close to the surface darkened his words.

She paid no attention to him and began placing the money in his hip pockets and buttoning the flaps. She tore a flour sack in two and laid the bills evenly in the center and folded it flat like a chest poultice. All the time he was swearing softly in outrage.

"Queen of the Underworld," he said, repeating a familiar mocking phrase.

"Unbutton your shirt." She fitted the money safely into his shirt and buttoned it again.

"By God, a man can't even do what he wants!"

Damon looked at him, loving him, finding it hard to see beyond his outward grace. Decision was a bitter experience.

She patted his chest. "That's the most of it."

"All right. You bring the rest and be careful. I'm gone." He pulled his hat down against the wind and picked up his bag.

They both stood still and listened, hardly breathing.

"Here they come. That goddamn law!"

"Sh-h-h."

They waited for the businesslike steps to place themselves surely before they moved.

"Put on your nightgown," he whispered.

"I haven't got one."

"Well, look sleepy."

All the steps made straight for the front door. Her father snorted scornfully.

"Goodbye," he whispered and kissed her quickly.

She put her arms tightly around his neck and kissed him. "Goodbye, Papa," she said very seriously.

"Take care of 'em, Queenie," he said gaily.

A loud authoritative knocking began. Her father went out the back door. Damon locked it and waited. Her sharp little ears heard the silky rustle of his swift, stealthy running. He would be lost in the dark of the shanties and over the line while she held up the law.

She opened the front door. Two deputy sheriffs stood close. The one flashing his star had his hand on the screen.

"Yer dad here?"

"No sir, he isn't," Damon said respectfully.

"Sure he ain't?"

"Yes sir, I'm sure."

"Where is he?" the second one asked roughly.

"Playing cards somewhere, I guess."

"Must be kinda tough on a kid like you alone," the older one said.

"It's all right. My father's really very nice."

"I'd be too," said the second deputy, "if I had his nimble wits and never no work."

"Now, Al, that won't get us no place. The kid's telling the truth." He smiled at Damon like a father, and she instinctively got ready for his next question. "Sure yer daddy ain't in there?"

"See?" She stood back and let them look into the room.

"The other room?"

"That's the kitchen."

"I see the foot of a bed."

"That's mine."

"What time's he generally come home?"

"All hours. Mostly around four or five."

"Maybe we'll wait."

"Yes sir."

He tried the screen gently. His face changed ever so little. "Open up, girlie. We'll have a look."

"No sir."

His eyes hardened. "I knew it!"

"He isn't here."

"Then open up!" He gave the screen a sharp tug but the latch held.

"No sir."

"Why not, if he ain't here?"

"I'm alone a lot and my father made me promise never to let any men in the house."

"We ain't—"

"Men?" she smiled.

"Now, look here, girlie, you know we won't harm you."

Damon looked at the second deputy. "No sir, I don't know it."

The first deputy glanced quickly at the second and a little fleck of suspicion grew in his eyes. Then he said, "Bah!" He jerked the screen hard.

"We'll have to come in. It'd be better to open the door."

Damon saw that they meant it. "You'll have to get a search warrant," she said firmly.

"Well, I'll—! You little—!"

"Please don't." She thought of the search and the rug. "I'll prove I'm telling the truth. One of you stand here and watch this room. One of you go around back and I'll open the door and you look through the screen. You can see everything."

"What about the closet?"

"There isn't any. Only a curtain. I'll pull it back. I'll shine the lamp under the beds. But you can't come in."

"Try it," said the first deputy, motioning the other to go round the house. Damon opened the back door. They craned and peered and the second deputy swore.

"I said to myself," the first one told her, "that he wouldn't hide home."

"He's downtown someplace," she said, "but I hope nothing happens." She looked sleepy and yawned.

The sheriff yawned. "Well, kid, get to bed. We won't bother you no more tonight." He winked at her. "Kinda smart about the search warrant."

"I'm sorry about that," she said. "Goodnight."

They clumped off together. "Lock up good," the older one called back.

She dashed cold water on her face, washed her body quickly and dressed, putting on silk stockings. She moved about the room in violent haste, watching the clock, sorting her few clothes for the best which she placed in her small bag. She searched the old dresser drawers for little things she wanted to keep. Finally she rolled the rug back. Bills from fives to fifties were scattered between the papers; she had to be careful not miss any. She looked with affection at the old Indian rug but she could never take it again, so she began shaping the bills in order carelessly, not counting them. She pinned a few inside her slip at the waist and breast, but in summer clothes there was little hiding space. She made up her mind quickly to carry a small amount in her purse and place the rest in the bag, some of it in the leaves of the Shelley poems. She locked the bag and put the little key on the chain around her neck, dropping the small heart and key inside her dress.

She looked at the clock once more. She was breathing hard and trembling again, and once tears started but she set her face and her thoughts away from the source. She wrote a note, and had to unlock the bag. She drew out a twenty dollar bill and looked at it, replaced it and drew out a fifty. She stuffed it into the envelope and reread the note. "Wait a few days and then go into our house and take everything. Here's the key. And a goodbye present. Just don't say anything, please."

She folded a newspaper under arm and took a handful of matches from the kitchen.

Outside it was darker than before. Damon pushed the envelope under the kitchen door of the next shack, and walked away into the night, her heart beating wildly threatening her speed.

The town was asleep and she thought her heart would wake it up. When she came to the tracks she ran along the center on the ties, knowing their space. Happydays being only a flagstop, the small station was dark. She went a little beyond it and set the bag down, standing on the ties. The great still prairie could be felt like a solitary and longing presence possessed by the wind which was always going away. Damon loved the wind and this wide grey land open as far as the eye could see like a barrierless world. She began to feel alone again, and free.

Into the silence the melodious far-away click of the train stitched the night like a needle and thread, the needle-point of light gleaming in the distant dark. The low longing call of the train like the voice of the prairie came swiftly now on the wind. The rails sang. And Damon thought that no music, no song would ever speak for her spirit as truly as the wind and the beckoning and farewelling call of a train going through lonely places.

She lighted the newspaper and swung it slowly back and forth like a lantern. Once more the whistle came, now in answer, brief and tolerant. She dropped the paper and placed a rock on its remains, stamping out the last small flames so that she should not cause a prairie fire.

It occurred to her that she had not thought of a destination. Quickly she decided on a larger town from which she could go on unnoticed. It would be better to buy a cash ticket a short distance and give a small bill.

The rails gleamed in the long head light, and their humming was lost in the great intense life of the train. Damon could feel its purpose and impatience. She obligingly stepped off the track and moved along near the road bed, pressing down her excitement, feeling adventurous and self-assured. The train was long and powerful, headed for far places, and she felt suddenly too small to stop it in its confident journey. But when the porter swung off and lifted her up into the car and banged the door closed with finality, her sureness returned. He was surprised to find her so young, and when he asked her what she was doing out in the night, she told a lie, as small as possible, and he believed her.

"What's your name?" he asked as if to soothe a child.

"Dolores O'Shea," she said surprising herself, and she saw that he believed her again.

While she was waiting for the conductor, Damon cupped her hands beside her eyes and looked out the door glass over the night plain. A single light twinkled in the town. Perhaps someone was sick or dying. The prairie was flying from under the train. She regretted to leave it in the dark and strained her eyes for the pure, far line between earth and sky that made the world seem large and inviting and unexplored.

Goodbye, Goodbye, she said in her mind to the prairie and the wind.

Now she watched for the point where the adobe hut must be. Goodbye. *Goodbye*. A hollow of pain remained in her thoughts where the word had been.

THE NAKED AND THE DEAD

by Norman Mailer

THEY sat down around the tree and waited silently. A battery fired in a grove about five hundred yards away and it lit up the area for a moment. "What's the artillery doin' up this close?" Wilson asked.

"It's Cannon Company," someone told him.

Wilson sighed. "All a man does is sit around an' git his tail wet."

"It seems to me," Goldstein said formally, "that they're managing this thing very poorly." His voice was eager and quick as if he were hoping for a discussion.

"You bitching again, Goldstein?" Croft asked.

The anti-semite, Goldstein thought. "I'm just expressing my opinion," he said.

"Opinion!" Croft spat. "A bunch of goddamn women have opinions."

Gallagher laughed quietly and mockingly. "Hey, Goldstein, you want a soap-box?" he asked.

"You don't like the army any more than I do," Goldstein said mildly.

Gallagher paused as if uncertain how to answer, and then sneered. "Balls," he said. "What's the matter, you want some gefilte fish." He stopped, and then as if delighted with what he had said, he added. "That's right, what Goldstein needs is some of that fuggin fish." A machine-gun began to fire again; because of the night it sounded very close.

"I don't like the way you express yourself," Goldstein said.

"You know what you can do," Gallagher said. He felt a little shame, and to drown it, he added fiercely. "You can go blow it out."

Goldstein felt as though he were surrounded by a bunch of hoodlums who were tormenting him. Something very deep inside him, very basic to all he had ever learned was heart-sick and weeping. He felt like doing nothing because all protest would be lost. "You just can't talk to me that way," he said. His voice trembled from emotion more than fear; he was in a turmoil, and he felt a repugnance at the idea of fighting, and a recognition of the deep necessity of it. "The goyim, that's all they know, to fight with their fists," he thought.

Red stepped in. He was feeling the discomfort that a display of emotion always roused in him. "Let's take it easy," he muttered. "You guys'll be getting plenty of fight in a minute." He snorted. "Fightin' over the army. As far as I'm concerned it's been a goddamn mess ever since they put Washington on a horse."

Toglio interrupted him. "You've got the wrong attitude, Red. It isn't decent to talk about George Washington that way."

Red slapped his knee. "You're a regular Boy Scout, aren't you, Toglio? You like the flag, huh?" For some reason, he found himself very angry.

Toglio thought of a story he had read once, *The Man Without A Country*. Red was like the man in that, he decided. "I think some things aren't fit for kidding," he said severely.

"You want to know something?"

Toglio knew a crack was coming, but against his judgment, he asked, "What?"

"The only thing wrong with this army is it never lost a war."

Toglio was shocked. "You think we ought to lose this one?"

Red found himself carried away. "What have I got against the goddamn Japs? You think I care if they keep this fuggin jungle? What's it to me if Cummings gets another star?"

"General Cummings, he's a good man," Martinez said.

"There ain't a good officer in the world," Red stated. "They're just a bunch of aristocrats, *they* think. General Cummings is no better than I am. His shit don't smell like ice cream, either."

Their voices were beginning to carry above a whisper, and Croft said, "Let's keep it down." The conversation was boring him. It was always the men who never got anywhere that did the bitching, he decided.

A soldier came walking toward them. "Are you guys, Recon?" he asked.

"Yeah," Croft said.

"Okay, you want to follow me?"

They picked up their packs, and began walking through the darkness. It was difficult for each man to see the man ahead of him. After they had gone a few hundred feet, the soldier who was leading them halted, and said, "Wait here."

Red swore. "Next time, let's do it by the numbers," he said. Cannon Company fired again, and the noise sounded very loud. Wilson dropped his pack and muttered, "Some poor sons-of-bitches are gonna catch hell in 'bout half a minute." He sighed again, and sat down on the ground which was wet. "You'd think they had somepin' better to do than have a whole squad of men walking around all night. Ah can't make up my mind if ah'm hot or cold." There was a wet heavy mist all over the ground, and alternately they would shiver in their wet clothing, and swelter in the airless night. Some Japanese artillery was landing about a mile away, and they listened to it quietly. It sounded dull and heavy like a tree falling in a wood.

A platoon of men filed by them, their rifles clanking against their helmets and their pack buckles. A flare went up a short distance away, and in its light they looked like black cutouts moving by a spotlight. Their rifles were slung at all odd angles, and their packs gave them a humped misshapen appearance. The sound of their walking was confused and intricate; like the truck convoy it resembled the murmuring of the wind or the whisper of surf. Then the flare died, and the column of men passed. When they were some distance away the only sound that still remained was the soft metallic jingle of their rifles. A skirmish had started about a mile away, and a few Jap rifles were firing. Red turned to Wyman and said, "Listen to them, tick-boom, tick-boom. You can't miss it." The report sounded like the creaking of a rocking chair, with a first short high-pitched note, and a second distinct and heavy one. A few American rifles answered it, and their fire sounded more powerful like a leather belt being slapped down on a table. Wyman shifted uneasily. "How far away do you figure the Japs are?" he asked Croft.

"Damned if I know. You'll see 'em soon enough, boy."

"Hell, he will," Red said. "We're going to be sitting around all night."

Croft spat. "You wouldn't mind that, would you Valsen?"

"Heroes bore me," Red said. He could feel a tension between them, and he leaned forward on the ground so that he could come to his feet in a hurry if it were necessary.

Some more soldiers walked past in the darkness, and a few trucks were pulling into the bivouac. Wyman lay down on the ground. He was a little surprised and chagrined that on his first night of combat, he should spend it trying to fall asleep. The water soaked through his shirt which was already wet, and he sat up again shivering. The air was terribly sultry. He wished he could light a cigarette.

They remained there for another half-hour before receiving the order to move. Croft stood up and followed their guide while the rest of them trailed behind. Their legs were stiff, and they treaded warily, freezing to a halt whenever some guns fired comparatively near. The guide led them into a patch of brush where a platoon of men were grouped about six anti-tank guns. They were 37's, about six feet long, with very slender barrels about the diameter of a man's wrist, and they were mounted on very small tires. One man could pull one gun without too much difficulty over level hard ground.

"We're going along with Anti-Tank up to First Battalion," Croft said. "We got to pull two of those guns."

Croft told them to gather around him. "I don't know how muddy the damn trail is going to be," he told them, "but it ain't too hard to guess. We're going to be in the middle of the column, so I'm going to cut us into three groups of three men each, and they'll be one group restin' all the time. I'll take Wilson and Gallagher, and Martinez can take Valsen and Ridges, and Toglio you got what's left—Goldstein and Wyman. We're scrapin' the barrel," he added dryly. He went up to talk to an officer for a few seconds. When he came back, he said, "We'll let Toglio's group have the first rest." He got behind one of the guns, and gave it a tug. "The son-of-a-bitch is going to be heavy in the mud," he said. Wilson and Gallagher started pulling it with him, and the other platoon which had already divided into a few men on each gun, began to move out. They tugged the guns across the bivouac area, and then passed through a gap in the barbed wire at which there was a machine-gun emplacement. "Have a good time men," the man at the machine-gun said.

"Blow it out," Gallagher said. The gun was beginning to drag on his arms already.

There were about fifty men in the column, and they moved very slowly down a narrow trail which led through the jungle. After they had moved a hundred feet along it they were no longer able to see the man ahead of them. The branches of the trees on either side of the trail met overhead, and they felt as if they were groping through an endless tunnel. Their feet sank into the mud which was soft and almost bottomless and after a few hundred yards their boots had become covered with great slabs of muck which seemed as heavy as blocks of concrete. The men on the guns would lunge forward for a few feet and then halt, lunge forward and halt. Every ten yards the gun would bog down in the mud, and the three men assigned to it would have to tug until their strength seeped from their fingers' ends, and the blood was draining from their heads. They would wrestle the gun out of its rut, and plunge it forward for fifteen feet before their momentum was lost. Then they would pull it and lift it for another few yards until it sank into a hole once more. The entire column labored and stumbled at a miserable pace along the trail. In the darkness they kept ganging up on each other, and the men on one gun would sometimes ride it up onto the muzzle of the one ahead, or fall behind for so many yards that the file at last broke into separate wriggling columns like a worm which may be cut into many parts and still live. The men at the rear had the worst time for the guns and men which had preceded them had churned the trail until it was like a marsh, and there were places where two teams would have to combine on one gun and carry it above the ground until they had passed the worst of the slime.

The trail was only a few feet wide, and it had been hastily cut. Huge roots were continually tripping the men, and their faces and hands became scratched and bleeding from the branches and thorns which crossed the path. In the complete darkness they had no idea of how the trail might bend, and sometimes on a down slope when they would let the gun roll a little distance by its own weight, they would fetch up at the bottom of the draw after having plunged the field piece completely off the trail. Then they would have to fumble in the brush, covering their eyes with their forearms to protect them from the vines and a laborious painful struggle to bring the gun back on the path would begin.

They were in danger for some Japanese might easily have been waiting in ambush, but it was impossible to keep silent. The guns squeaked and lumbered, made sucking sounds as their tires sank into the mud, and the men swore helplessly, and panted with deep sobbing sounds like wrestlers at the end of a long bout. The narrow tunnel which wriggled through the jungle was filled with sound. Voices and commands echoed through it hollowly, and were lost in a chorus of profanity and hoarse breathless sobbing and the straining sweating noises of men in great labor. Curiously it sounded when it was all combined like the wailing animal laments of women mourning their dead. After a time the soldiers forgot there was some peril in their situation, they even forgot there was an enemy. By the time an hour had passed nothing existed for them but the slender cannon they had to push down the track. The sweat drenched their clothing and filled their eyes until they could not have seen anything if it had been midday. They grappled and blundered and swore, and advanced the little guns a few feet at a time, with no consciousness any longer of what they were doing.

When one team of three men would be relieved by another they would stagger alongside the guns, trying to regain their wind, falling behind sometimes to rest for a little while. After every ten minutes the column would halt to allow the stragglers to catch up, and during the halts the men would sprawl in the middle of the trail not caring how the mud covered them. Their fatigue was so great that they felt as if they had been running for hours; they could not regain their breath, and their stomachs retched emptily. Some of them began to throw away their equipment; their helmets felt like furnaces and seemed made of brick. One after another of the men threw their helmets aside, or dropped them on the trail. The air had become unbearably hot under the canopy of the jungle, and they felt as if they were groping through a steam chamber. The darkness had given no relief from the heat of the day; if anything, walking in the trail was like fumbling through an endless closet stuffed with velvet garments.

In one of the halts, the officer who was leading the file, worked his way back to find Croft. "Where's Sergeant Croft?" he would shout from time to time, and his words would be repeated by a man here and there along the trail until it reached Croft.

"Here, sir."

The two men searched for each other in the darkness, and when they met they talked in low panting bursts of speech. "How're your men?" the officer asked.

"Okay."

They sat down beside the trail. "Mistake trying this," the officer gasped. "Have to get through."

Croft with his lean ropy body, had borne the labor comparatively well. His voice was unsteady and he had to talk with short quick spates of words, but his breathing was not very loud. "How far?" he asked.

"Have to go one mile . . . one mile yet. More than half-way there, I think. Never should have tried it."

"They need the guns bad?"

The officer halted for a moment, and tried to speak normally. "I think so . . . There's no tank weapons there . . . up on the line. We stopped a tank attack two hours ago . . . at Third Battalion. Orders came to move some 37's over to First Battalion. Guess they expect attack there."

"Better get them through," Croft said. He was feeling contempt because the officer had to talk to him. The man ought to be able to do his own job, he thought.

"Have to, I guess." He stood up, and leaned for a moment against a tree. "If you get a gun stuck, let me know. Have to cross a stream up ahead. Bad place, I think."

He began to feel his way forward, and Croft turned around and worked his way back to the gun he was pulling. The column was over two hundred yards long by now. They began to move, and the laborious moil continued once more. The soft wailing sound, like a deep unfathomable sorrow, flowed through the aisle of the jungle; to it was added from time to time the wistful murmur of a shell carrying overhead, or the staccato uncertain noise of a machine-gun like an outboard motor that sputtered and stopped, sputtered and stopped. Once or twice a flare filtered a wan and delicate bluish light over the soldiers, but it was almost lost in the dense foliage through which it had to pass. In the brief moment that it lasted, they were caught at their guns in classic straining motions that had the form and beauty of a frieze; their uniforms were twice blackened by the water and the dark slime of the trail, their faces stood out, white and contorted, for the instant that the light shone on them. Even the guns had a slender articulated beauty like an insect reared back on its wire haunches, ready to strike. Then the darkness swirled about them again, and they ground the guns forward in blindness, struggling and bent like a line of ants dragging their burden back to their hole.

The soldiers were in the state of fatigue where they hated everything. They hated their guns first, but they hated the officer who led them, the sergeant over them, the General, the company commander who had assigned their platoon to this detail, even the fate which compelled them to serve the guns. Odd thoughts went through their minds; they decided to disappear in the jungle at the next halt or to fall in the mud and not move, letting the guns and men behind trample over them. They wanted anything which would release them from their toil, and they grappled onward stupidly, no longer even remembering clearly when they were pushing the guns and when their group was relieved. Occasionally a man would slip in the mud, and remain there for many seconds, breathing hoarsely, having no will to get to his feet. That part of the column would halt, and they would wait numbly for the soldier to join them. If they had breath they would swear.

"Fug the son-of-a-bitchin' mud."

"Get up," somebody would cry.

"Let me lay here, I'm okay, they ain't a thing wrong with me, I'm okay, let me lay."

"Fug you, *get up!*"

And they would labor forward a few more yards, and halt. In the darkness, distance had no meaning, nor did time; the men shuddered from the agony of their fatigue. After a time, the heat seemed to have left their bodies; they shivered and trembled in the damp night, and everything about them was sodden and pappy; they stank but it was no longer with animal smells, their clothing was plastered with the foul muck of the jungle mud, and a chill dank rotting smell somewhere between leaf mold and faeces filled their nostrils. They knew only that they had to keep moving, and if they thought of time it was in so many convulsions of nausea.

Wyman was wondering why he did not collapse. He was conscious only of an immense agony which filled his entire body and mind. His breath came in long parched shudders like a sterile wind over an inflamed desert, his pack-straps galled, his feet felt as if they were ablaze, and he could not have spoken for his throat and chest and mouth seemed covered with a coarse and woolly felt. He was no longer even conscious of the powerful and fetid stench that arose from his clothing. Somewhere deep inside himself was a wonder and a hatred at the exhaustion his body could endure. He was normally a sluggish youth who worked no more than he was obliged to, and the sensations of labor, the muscle strains, the panting, the taste of fatigue in his mouth were something he always tried to avoid as a matter of course. He had had vague dreams about combat, he thought idly at times of being a hero, assuming that it would bring him some immense reward which would ease his life and remove the problems of supporting his mother and himself. He had a girl friend and he wanted to dazzle her with his ribbons. But he had always imagined combat as something exciting and intense with no misery and no physical exertion. He dreamed of himself as charging across a field in the face of many machine-guns, but in the dream there was no stitch in his side from running too far while bearing too much weight; it was effortless and heady, and the results were always worth it.

He had never thought that he would be chained to an inanimate monster of metal with which he would have to grapple until his arms trembled helplessly, and his body was ready to fall; certainly he had never conceived that he would stumble down a path in the middle of the night with his shoes sucking and dragging in the muddy ooze at his feet. He pushed at the gun, he lifted it with Goldstein and Toglio when it became mired in a hole, but the motions were automatic by now; he hardly even felt the added pain when they had to pull it out by the wheel hubs. His fingers were no longer able to close, and often he would tug helplessly until his hands slipped away with the gun still unmoved. The column was proceeding even more slowly than it had at the start, and sometimes fifteen minutes would elapse before a gun could be moved a hundred yards. Every now and then a man would faint, and would be left by the side of the trail to make his way back alone when he recovered.

At last, a message began to carry back along the trail, "Keep going, we're almost there," and for a few minutes it served as a stimulant, so that the men labored with some hope again. But when each turning in the trail discovered only another ribbon of mud and darkness, the men began to feel a hopeless dejection. Sometimes for as much as a minute they would not move at all. It became harder and harder to pitch themselves against the guns again. Every time they stopped they felt like quitting.

There was a draw they had to cross a few hundred feet before they reached First Battalion, and its banks sloped very steeply down to a little stony brook, and then slanted up again abruptly to about fifteen feet above the bottom. This was the stream the officer had mentioned. When the men reached it, the column stopped completely, and the stragglers caught up. Each team of soldiers waited for the men and gun in front of them to cross the stream. In the night it was an extremely difficult business at best, and it took a very long time. The men would go sliding down the bank trying to restrain their field-piece from turning over at the bottom, and then they would have to lift it over the slippery rocks of the brook, before attempting to wrestle with it up to the other side. There the banks were slimy, and there was no foothold; time and again a team of men would force their gun up almost to the top of the draw before slipping back again helplessly.

By the time Wyman and Toglio and Goldstein had to move their gun a half-hour had passed and they were a little rested. Their breath had returned and they kept shouting instructions to each other as they nosed the gun over the edge of the descending bank. It began to pull away from them, and they had to resist desperately to keep it from crashing to the bottom. The exertion drained most of the strength they had recovered, and after they had carried the piece across the stream, they were as fatigued as they had been at any time during the march.

They stopped for a few moments to gather whatever force was left in them and then began the struggle up the banks. Toglio was wheezing like a bull, and his commands had a hoarse urgent sound as if he were wrenching them from deep inside his body. "Okay, PUSH . . . PUSH," he growled, and the three of them strove numbly to roll the gun. It resisted them, moved sluggishly and treacherously like a boulder being impelled up a hill of ice, and the strength began to flow out of their trembling legs. "HOLD IT," Toglio shouted, "DON'T LET IT SLIP!" They braced themselves behind the gun, trying to wedge their feet into the wet clay of the bank. "PUSH AGAIN," he shouted, and they forced it upward a few more feet. Wyman felt as if a band were stretching dangerously inside his body, and would snap at any moment. They rested again, and then shoved the gun another few yards. Slowly, minute by minute, they came closer to the top. They were perhaps four feet from the crest when Wyman lost the last reserves of his strength. He tried to draw some few shreds of effort from his quivering limbs, but he seemed to collapse all at once, and he just lay stupidly behind the gun supporting it with no more than the weight of his sagging body. The gun began to slip, and he pulled away. Toglio and Goldstein were left at each of the hubs, straining helplessly. When Wyman let go they felt as if someone were pushing down against the gun. Goldstein held on until the sliding wheels pulled his fingers loose one by one, and then he just had time to shout, "WATCH IT!" to Toglio before the gun went crashing down to the bottom. The three men fell after it, rolling in its wake as if they were chips of wood pulled into a current. The gun had struck some rocks at the bottom, and one of the wheels had been knocked completely awry. They felt it in the darkness like pups licking the wounds of their mother, and Wyman began to blubber with exhaustion.

The accident caused a great deal of confusion. Croft's team was on the gun which was waiting behind them, and he began to shout, "What's holdin' you up? What's happening down there?"

Even in the lethargy which disaster had brought upon him, Toglio hated to admit that he had been unsuccessful. "We had . . . trouble," he shouted back. "Wait!" But when he and Goldstein succeeded in turning the gun on its side, they realized that the wheel would not move. "The wheel's shot," Toglio shouted up to Croft. "We can't move the gun."

Croft swore. "Get her out of the way."

They tried, and couldn't budge it.

"We need help," Goldstein shouted.

Croft swore again, and then he and Wilson slid down the bank to them, and began to push at the gun. After a little while they were able to tumble it over and over enough times to move it down the creek bed. Without saying anything, Croft went back to his gun, and Toglio and the others climbed up the far bank, and went staggering down the trail till they reached First Battalion's bivouac. The men who had arrived there already with the guns were lying on the ground motionless in the apathy of over-exertion. Toglio without saying anything stretched out in the mud, and Wyman and Goldstein lay down beside him. None of them spoke for ten minutes. Occasionally when a shell would burst somewhere in the jungle about them, their legs might twitch but this was the only sign they gave of being conscious. Men were moving about all the time, and the sounds of the fighting were closer, more vicious. Voices kept coming to them out of the darkness, and being lost again. Someone would shout, "where's the pack train for B Company?" and the answer would be muffled to the men who were lying on the ground. They hardly cared. Noises flowed through them unrecognized as if they had been riding in an automobile for a long time. Occasionally they would become conscious of the sounds of the night; for a few instants they would concentrate on the constant thrumming which emanated from the jungle, and then they would lie empty again, thinking of nothing but the joy of allowing their bodies to rest.

Croft and Wilson and Gallagher brought their gun in a little while later, and Croft shouted for Toglio.

"What do you want? I'm here," Toglio said. He hated to move.

Croft came toward him in the darkness, and sat down beside him. His breath was coming in long slow gasps like a runner after a race. "I'm going to see the Lieutenant . . . tell him about the gun. How the hell did it happen?"

Toglio propped himself on an elbow. He hated the explanations which were to come, and he felt confused. He never liked to fail, and yet he had been so close to giving up so many times on this night, that in a vague way he felt justified in having brought the gun even up to the brook. "I don't know," he said. "I heard Goldstein yell 'watch out' and then it just seemed to rip out of our hands." Toglio hated to give excuses to Croft.

"Goldstein yelled, huh?" Croft asked. "Where is he?"

"Here I am, sergeant." Goldstein's voice came out of the darkness beside them.

"Why'd you yell, 'watch out'?"

"I don't know. It felt suddenly as if I couldn't hold it any more. Something pulled it away from me."

"Who was the other man?"

Wyman roused himself. "I guess I was." His voice sounded weak.

"Did you let go?" Croft asked.

Wyman felt a trace of fear as he thought of admitting that to Croft. He wanted only to be let alone. "No," he said, "no, I don't think so. I heard Goldstein yell, and then the gun felt as if it was going to come down on me. It started to roll back and I got out of the way." Already he was uncertain exactly how it had occurred, and a part of his mind was trying to convince him that he spoke the truth. With it, however, he felt a surprising flush of shame. "I guess it was my fault," he blurted out honestly, but his voice was so tired that it lacked sincerity, and Croft thought he was trying to protect Goldstein.

"Yeah," Croft said. He felt a spasm of rage working in him, and he turned on Goldstein and said, "Listen, Izzy."

"My name isn't Izzy," Goldstein said angrily.

"I don't give a damn what it is. The next time you pull a goddamn trick like that, letting everybody down, I'm going to put you in for a court-martial."

"But I don't think I let go," Goldstein protested weakly. By now he was no longer sure. The sequence of his sensations when the gun had begun to pull out of his hands was already too confused for him to feel righteous. He had thought that Wyman stopped pushing first, but when Wyman had declared he was to blame, Goldstein had had a moment of panic. Like Croft, he had believed that Wyman was protecting him. "I don't know," he said, "I don't think I did."

"You don't think," Croft cut him off. "Listen, for as long as you've been in the platoon, Goldstein, you've done nothing but have ideas about how we could do something better. But when it comes down to a little goddamn work, you're always dicking off. I've had enough of that from you."

Once again Goldstein was feeling a helpless anger. As if it were a reaction he could not control, his agitation was even greater than his resentment and it choked him so he could not speak. He tried to force out a few words, to deny what Croft had said, but again he was afraid to open his mouth for fear he could not control his voice. A few tears of frustration welled in his eyes, and he turned away and lay down again. His anger was now directed toward himself and he felt a hopeless shame. "Oh, I don't know, I don't know," he said.

Toglio had a mingled relief and pity. He was glad that the onus of losing the gun was not his, and yet he felt unhappy that anyone should be blamed. The bond of common effort which the three men had felt while they were struggling with the weapon was still with him, and he said to himself, "poor Goldstein, he's a good guy, but he just has hard luck."

Wyman was too exhausted to think clearly. After he had declared that it was his fault, he had felt a secret pleasure that he was not to be blamed after all. He was actually too depleted to think consecutively about anything, or indeed even remember anything. By now, he was convinced that it was Goldstein who had deserted the gun first, and his main reaction was one of comfort; the one image which was still vivid to him was the agony he had felt in his chest and groin as they had started up the embankment, and he said to himself, "I would have let go two seconds later if he hadn't." For this reason, Wyman now felt a dulled sense of affection for Goldstein.

Croft stood up. "Well, that's one gun they ain't going to rescue for a little while," he said. "I bet it stays there for the whole campaign." He was feeling enraged enough to strike Goldstein or kick him. Croft always pitted himself against totality of men and things which opposed him. He had hated the trail, the mud, the dumb brutal weight of the gun with the same kind of emotion with which he had hated Wilson and Gallagher when he felt they were not working as hard as he. The entire march had been a contest between himself and everything else. He hated Goldstein now, not because a gun was lost and he, as the sergeant in command, might be responsible, but because he had been defeated; he had not been able to bring in all his guns.

Without saying anything more, Croft left them and went in search of the officer who had led the column. The battle had been threatening all evening like a summer thunderstorm which never breaks. In the area where they had brought the anti-tank guns, the men in Recon were going to sleep. Occasionally a shell would burst in the jungle near by, but they hardly cared. They were too tired to dig a hole, and it would have taken a barrage to have moved them. It took Red longer to fall asleep than any of the others; for many years his kidneys had bothered him whenever he worked too hard or had too much exposure to dampness. Apart from his fatigue his kidneys were throbbing now and he turned several times on the wet ground, trying to decide if it were more painful to sleep with his back against the moist earth or exposed to the night air. He lay awake for a long time thinking, his mood turning through a small gamut from weariness to sadness. He was thinking of a time when he had gone for two days without food; he had been caught in a small town in Nebraska with no jobs to be had, and he had to wait until he could catch a box-car out of town. It had seemed very important to him then not to beg for something to eat, and he wondered now if he still had that pride. "Oh, I've been tough in my time," he muttered to himself, "lot of good it does me." The air was cold on his back, and morosely he turned over. It seemed to him for a moment that all his life he had been sleeping in bare wet places, seeking for warmth. He thought of an old hobo saying, "half a buck in your pocket and winter coming," and felt again some of the gloom he had known on cold October twilights. His stomach was empty, and he got up after a while and rummaged through his pack for something to eat. He took out a K-ration at last and chewed the fruit bar, washing it down with lots of water from his canteen. His blanket was still wet from the evening storm, but he wrapped it about him, and found a little warmth. Then he tried to go to sleep again, but his kidneys were throbbing too badly. At last he sat up, fumbled in the first aid kit on his cartridge belt, and withdrew the little paper bag of wound tablets. He swallowed half of them, and drank about half the water remaining in his canteen. For a moment he thought of using them all, but then he remembered that he might be wounded and would need them. It brought back again his mood of dejection, and he stared solemnly into the darkness, being able to discern after a time the bodies of the sleeping men around him. Toglio was snoring, and he heard Martinez mutter softly in Spanish, and then as his dream caught him, Martinez cried out, "I no kill Jap, God, I no kill him." Red sighed, and lay down again. "What men sleep easy?" he thought.

He felt a trace of an old anger which had long since hardened into indifference and stoicism. "I don't give a damn about anything," he said to himself, and felt a little uneasy as he listened to a shell sighing overhead. This time it sounded like the branches of a tree murmuring in a winter wind. He remembered once striding along a highway as evening came. It had been in the eastern coal mining towns of Pennsylvania and he had watched the miners driving home in their battered Fords, their faces still dark from the day's accumulation of soot and coal dust. It had not looked anything like the mining country in Montana which he had left years before, and yet it had been the same. He had walked along, brooding about home, and someone had given him a ride and treated him to a drink in a noisy merry bar. That night had a quiet beauty about it to him now, and he remembered for a moment the sensation of leaving a strange town at night on a dark freight. Things like that were only glints of light in the long grey day of those years. He sighed again as if to grasp again something of the knowledge he had felt for an instant. "Nobody gets what he wants," he said to himself, and this deepened his mood of pleasurable sorrow. He was growing drowsy, and he burrowed his head under his forearm. A mosquito began to whine by his ear, and he lay still, hoping it would go away. The ground seemed crawling with insects but he shut his mind to it stoically. "The little buggers are one thing I'm used to," he thought. For some reason this made him smile.

It was beginning to rain, and Red covered his head with the blanket. His body was slowly sinking into a weary slumber in which different parts of him seemed to fall asleep at separate intervals, so that long after he had stopped to think, a portion of his mind could still feel the quivering of an exhausted limb or a cramp in one of his fingers. The shelling was becoming steady, and a half-mile away from him a machine-gun kept firing. Almost asleep, he watched Croft return and spread out a blanket. The rain fell softly, and after a time he could no longer distinguish between the artillery and the thunder. Even when he was completely asleep, one last area of his mind seemed to notice what was happening. Although he didn't remember it when he awoke, he heard a platoon of men march by, and he was conscious of some other men beginning to push the anti-tank guns to the other side of the bivouac. "There's a Jap road leads into this bivouac," he said in his sleep. "They're going to protect it now." Probably, he was a little feverish.

He dreamt until he heard a voice shout, "Recon, where's Recon?" The dream ebbed away, and he lay there drowsily, listening to Croft spring to his feet and holler, "Here, over here." Red knew he would have to be moving in a few minutes, and he burrowed deeper into his blanket. His body ached and he knew when he stood up, he would be stiff. "All right, men, get up," Croft was shouting. "Come on, get up, we got to move."

Red pulled the cover off his face. It was still raining, and as he felt the top surface of the blanket his hand came away wet. When he replaced the blanket in his pack his pack would become sopping. "Aaaahhhhrr." He cleared his throat with disgust and spat once or twice. The taste in his mouth was foul. Gallagher sat up beside him and groaned. "I'd like to catch the son-of-a-bitch who shit in my mouth," he said furiously. "Goddamn army, why don't they let a guy sleep? Ain't we done enough tonight?"

"We're heroes," Red said. He stood up, and began to fold his blanket. It was sopping wet on one side and muddy on the other. He had slept with his rifle beside him, covered under the blanket, but it too was wet. Red wondered how long it had been since he was dry. "Goddamn jungle," he said.

"Come on, you men, snap it up," Croft said. A flare lit the wet ugly shrubs about them, and flickered dully against their wet black clothing. Red saw that Gallagher's face was covered with mud, and when he felt his own his hands came away soiled. "Show me the way to go home," he hummed. "I'm tired and I want to go to bed."

"Yeah," Gallagher said. They made their packs together, and stood up. The flare had gone out and they were blinded for a moment in the returning darkness. "Where we going?" Toglio asked.

"Up to A Company. They expect an attack there," Croft said.

"We sure are a hard-luck platoon," Wilson sighed. "At least we're done with them there anti-tank guns. Ah swear ah'd fight a tank with mah hands 'fore ah'd rassle with one of them sons-of-bitches again."

The squad formed a single file and began to move out. First Battalion's bivouac was very small and in thirty seconds they had reached the gap in the barbed wire. Martinez was leading them, and he felt his way cautiously down the trail leading to A Company. His drowsiness vanished quickly, and he felt very alert. Actually, he could not see anything at all, but some sense seemed to guide him along the bends in the path, so that he rarely stumbled or blundered off the trail. He was proceeding about thirty yards ahead of the other men and he was completely isolated. If some Japanese had been waiting in ambush along the path, he would have been the first to be trapped. Yet, he was feeling very little fear; Martinez' terror was something which developed in a void; the moment he had to do something, to lead men, his courage returned. At this moment, his mind was poised over a number of sounds and thoughts. His ears were searching the jungle ahead of him for some noise which might indicate that men were waiting in the brush beside the trail; they were also listening with disgust to the stumbling and muttering of the men following behind him. His mind was recording the sounds of intermittent battle and trying to classify them; he was looking at the sky whenever they passed through a partial clearing in order to find the Southern Cross and determine in which direction the trail was bending. Wherever he could, he would make a mental note of some land mark they were passing, and add it to the list of the ones he observed previously. After a time he kept repeating a jingle to himself which went, "tree over trail, muddy creek, rock on trail, bushes across." Actually there was no reason for him to do this now; the trail led only from First Battalion to A Company, and he knew that, but it was a habit which he had formed on his first patrols. He did it instinctively by now.

And still another part of his mind was feeling a quiet pride that he was the man upon whom the safety of the others depended. This was something he almost always felt; it was a sustaining force which often carried him through dangers that his will and body would have resisted. During the march with the anti-tank guns there had been many times when he wanted to quit; unlike Croft he had felt it no contest at all, he would have been perfectly willing to have declared the task beyond his strength, and to have given up, but there was a part of his mind that drove him to do things he feared and detested; his pride at being a sergeant was the core about which nearly all his actions and thoughts were bound. "Nobody see in the darkness like Martinez," he said to himself. He felt a branch before his extended arm and he knelt easily and walked under it. His feet were sore and his back and shoulders ached, but they were ills with which he no longer concerned himself; he was leading his squad, and that was sufficient in itself.

The other men were having much more trouble than he. Croft was trailing Martinez and the rest of the squad was strung out behind. They were feeling a variety of emotions. Wilson and Toglio were sleepy, Red was alert and brooding—he had a sense of foreboding. Goldstein was miserable and bitter, and the tension he felt at creeping down a trail in the black early hours of the morning made him gloomy and then sad. He thought of himself dying without friends near by to mourn him. Wyman had lost his power to recuperate; he was so overtired that he plodded along in a stupor not caring where he went or what happened to him. Ridges was weary and patient; he did not think of what the next hours would bring him nor did he lose himself in a contemplation of his aching limbs; he just walked and his mind drifted slowly like a torpid stream.

And Croft, Croft was tense and eager and impatient. All night he had felt balked by the delays and the assignment of the squad to a labor detail; he wanted to see some action. By now it was an urge in his blood that was similar to the ache men have when they want a woman or a fight or a game in which they excel. All the cross-currents in their natures focus for a brief hour on one desire which is meaningful and all-powerful while it lasts. Croft was feeling this. The sounds of battle which he had been hearing all night were now intense and stimulating to him. His mind was buoyed by a recurrence of the mood he had felt after Hennessey's death. He felt strong and tireless and capable of anything; his muscles were as strained and jaded as any of the men's were, but he did not feel it; his mind had excluded his body and he was no more conscious of the twinges and aches of his limbs than a man who was very sick, and in a partial coma, might have been. He hungered for the first taut pulse he felt in his throat after he killed a man.

On the map there was only a half-mile between First Battalion and A Company, but the trail doubled and curved so often that it was actually a mile. The men in Recon were tired and their bodies felt abused; most of them felt clumsy now and uncertain of their footing. Their packs sagged until they hung limply from the small of their backs, and their rifles kept sliding off their shoulders whenever they had to stoop because the foliage grew too low. The trail was crude; it had been ordinarily a game wallow which had been enlarged, and in places it was very narrow. A man could not walk through without some branches scratching him on either side. The jungle was impenetrable at that point, and it would have taken a man an hour to have cut his way a hundred feet off the path. In the night it was impossible to see anything and the smell of the wet foliage was choking and rife. The men had to walk in single file, drawn up very close. Even at three feet they could not see one another and so they plodded down the trail with each man holding on to the shirt of the man before him. Martinez could hear them and judge his distance accordingly, but the others stumbled and collided with one another like children playing a game in the dark. They were bent over almost double, and their packs gave them an odd distorted appearance. If they had been visible they would have looked like a column of pelicans strutting in line, their bills fastened to the tail of the bird before them. Their bodies were outraged; they had been eating and sleeping with no rhythm at all, and their bent double posture was cramping their stomachs. They kept loosing gas, and the smell was sickly and nauseating in the foul dense air. The men at the rear had it the worst of all; they gagged and swore, tried not to breathe for a few seconds, and shuddered from fatigue and revulsion. Gallagher was at the end of the file, and every few minutes he would cough, and then curse. "Cut out the goddamn farting," he would shout, and then men in front would rouse themselves for a moment and laugh.

"Eating dust, hey boy," Wilson muttered, and a few of them began to giggle.

Some of them began to fall asleep as they walked. Their eyes had been closed almost the entire march, and they drowsed for the instant their foot was in the air and then awakened as it reached the ground. Wyman had been plodding along for many minutes with no other thought or sensation than his unutterable fatigue; his body had grown numb and he felt as if he were covered with a lead-lined container that absorbed all other feelings. He and Ridges kept drowsing continually, and every now and then they would walk for ten or fifteen yards completely asleep. At last their bodies would weave off the trail and they would go pitching into the bushes stupidly before they could regain their balance. In the darkness the noise was terrifying; they sounded like immense animals thrashing through a forest. Some of the men were beginning to feel an uncomfortable awareness of how close they were to the fighting; a half-mile to the left some rifles were firing, and the sound as it came through the deep mesh of the jungle was like corks being removed from bottles, and then like the crackling of a bonfire.

"Goddamnit," one of them would whisper, "can't you guys keep quiet?"

The march must have taken them over half an hour, but after the first few minutes they no longer thought about time. Crouching and sliding through the mud with their hands on the man in front of them became the only thing they really knew and it had the endlessness of striding a treadmill; they didn't concern themselves with where they were going. To most of them the end of the march came as a surprise.

Martinez doubled back and told them to be quiet. "They hear you coming for ten minutes," he whispered. A hush settled over the men, and they trod the last hundred yards with ridiculous precautions, tensing every muscle whenever they took a step.

There was no barbed wire, nor any clearing at A Company. The trail divided in a quadruple fork which led to different emplacements. A soldier met them where the path broke up, and led the squad along one of the foot-paths to a few pup tents pitched in the middle of some foliage. "I got Second Platoon," he told Croft. "I'm just about a hundred yards down the river. Your squad can sleep in these holes tonight, and set up a guard right along here. They's two machine-guns set up for you."

"What's doing?" Croft whispered.

"I dunno. The last thing I heard they expect an attack all up and down the line about dawn. We had to send a platoon over to C Company early tonight, and we been holding down the whole outpost here with less than a platoon." He made a rustling sound in the darkness as he wiped his hand against his mouth, and then he grasped Croft's elbow. "C'mere, I'll show you the set-up," he said. Croft slipped his arm free; he hated to have anyone touch him.

They trod a few feet along the path, and then the sergeant from A Company stepped into a hole. There was a machine-gun mounted in front, its muzzle just projecting through a fringe of bushes. Croft peered beyond the cover and in the faint moonlight he was able to see a narrow stream of water, and a strip of beach on either side of it, about thirty feet wide. "How deep is the river?" he asked.

"Aw, it's four, five feet maybe. That water ain't going to stop them."

"Any outposts forward of here?" Croft asked.

"Nothing. And the Japs know right where we are. Had some patrols up." The soldier wiped his mouth again, and stood up. "I'll show you the other machine-gun." They walked along a stubby path parallel to the river that cut through the jungle about ten feet from its edge. Some crickets were chirping loudly, and the soldier trembled a little. "Here's the other one," he said. "This is the flank." He peered through the bushes, and stepped out onto the strip of beach. "Look," he said. Croft followed him. About fifty yards to their right, the bluffs of Watamai Range began. Croft looked up. They were fantastic cliffs rising almost vertically for perhaps a thousand feet. Even in the darkness, he felt it hovering above them. He strained his eyes and thought he saw a swatch of sky where they ended but he could not be certain. He felt a curious thrill. "I didn't know we were that close," he said.

"Oh, yeah. It's good and it's bad. You don't have to worry about them coming around that end, but still we're the flank. If they ever hit here hard, there ain't much to hold them." The soldier drew into the bushes again, and exhaled his breath slowly. "I'll tell you these two nights we been out here give me the creeps. Look at that river. When there's a lot of moonlight it just seems to shine, and you get jittery after awhile looking at it." Croft remained outside the jungle edge, looking at the stream which curved away at the right and flowed parallel to the range. It took a turn toward the Japanese lines just a few yards before the first walls of the bluff began, and he felt he could see everything on that side. To the left the stream ran straight for a few hundred yards, and it looked a little like a highway at night, sunk between two high grassy banks. "Where are you?" he asked.

The soldier pointed to a tree which projected a little from the jungle. "We're just on this side of it. If you got to get to us, go back to the fork, and then take the trail at the far right going away from here. Yell, Buckeye, when you come up."

"Okay," Croft said. They talked for a few more minutes, and then the other sergeant hooked his cartridge belt. "Jesus, I'll tell ya, it'll drive ya crazy spending a night here. Just wilderness, that's all, and you stuck out at the end of it with nothing but a lousy machine-gun." He slung his rifle, and struck off down the trail. Croft looked at him for a moment, and then went back to Recon. The men were waiting where he had left them by the three tents, and he showed them where the two machine-guns were placed. Briefly he told them what he had learned, and picked a guard. "It's three a.m. now," he told them. "They's gone to be four of us on one post and five on the other. We'll do it in two-hour shifts, and then the post that only got four men will get the extra one for the next time around." He divided them up, and decided he would take the first shift at the flank gun. Wilson volunteered to take the other gun. "After ah'm done, ah'm gonna want to sleep right on through," Wilson said. "Ah'm tired of gittin' up right when ah'm havin' a good dream."

The men smiled wanly. They were so depleted by now that their nerves were a little tense. "An' listen," Croft added, "If any trouble starts the men that are sleeping are to git up *goddamn* fast, and move to help us. It's only a couple of yards from your tents to Wilson's machine-gun, and it ain't much further to mine. It shouldn't be taking you all more than about three hours to reach us." Again, a couple of men smiled. "Okay, that's about it," Croft said. He left them, and walked over to his machine-gun.

He sat down on the edge of it, and peered through the bushes at the river. The jungle completely surrounded him and he felt tired and wet. He had been denying his fatigue for many hours, and now that he was no longer active, it was exacting its demands from him. He felt weary and a little depressed. To counteract it, he began to feel the various objects in the hole. There were three boxes of belt ammunition, and a row of grenades lined up neatly at the base of the machine-gun. He counted seven of them. At his feet, in the hole, were a box of flares and a flare gun. He picked it up and broke open the breech quietly, loaded it, and cocked it. Then he set it down beside him again.

A few shells murmured overhead, and began to fall. He was a little surprised at how near they landed on the other side of the river. It could not have been more than a few hundred yards, and the noise of their explosion was extremely loud; a few pieces of shrapnel lashed the leaves on the trees above him. He broke off a stalk from a plant and put it in his mouth, chewing slowly and reflectively. A few mortars were firing in back of him, perhaps a quarter of a mile to the left rear. He guessed that it was the Weapons Platoon of A Company, and he tried to determine which trail at the fork would lead to them in case he had to pull back his men. Now he felt patient and at ease with himself; the danger of their position had neutralized the passion he had felt earlier for some combat, and he was left cool and calm and very tired.

The mortar shells were falling perhaps fifty yards in front of the platoon at his left, and Croft spat quietly. It was too close to be merely harassing fire; someone had heard something in the jungle on the other side of the river or they would never have called for mortars so close to their own position. He felt about in the hole again, and discovered a field telephone placed in the corner. Croft picked up the receiver and listened quietly. It was an open line and he thought that it was probably confined to the platoons of A Company. Two men were talking in very low voices and he strained to hear them.

"Walk it up another fifty and then bring it back."

"You sure they're Japs?"

"I swear I heard them talking."

Croft stared tensely across the river. The moon had come out, and the strands of beach on either side of the narrow stream of water were shining with a silver glow. The jungle wall on the other side seemed completely dense and impenetrable.

The mortars fired again behind him with a cruel flat sound, and then the shells began to arch down. He watched them land a little further in the jungle and then as the next volleys fell, the explosions crept nearer and nearer to the river. A mortar answered from the Japanese side of the river, and about a quarter of a mile to the left, Croft could hear several machine-guns spattering at each other. The uproar was deep and irregular; one gun sounded like a man beating a blanket rapidly, and the other sputtered and popped like a motorcycle engine. Croft picked up the phone and whistled into it. "Wilson!" he whispered. *"Wilson!"* There was no answer, and he debated whether to walk over to Wilson's hole. Silently, Croft cursed him for not having noticed the phone, and then he berated himself for not having discovered it before he briefed the others. He looked out across the river. "Fine sergeant I am," he told himself.

His ears were keyed to all the sounds of the night, and from long experience he sifted out all the ones which he knew were meaningless. If an animal rustled in its hole he paid no attention, if some crickets chirped his ear disregarded the noise. Now, he had suddenly picked up a muffled slithering sound which he knew could only be made by a number of men moving as silently as possible through a thin patch of jungle. He peered across the river trying to determine where the foliage was least dense. At a point between his gun and Wilson's, there seemed to be a grove of a few coconut trees which were sparse enough to allow men to assemble; as he stared into that patch of wood he was certain he had heard a man move. Croft's mouth tightened. His hand felt for the bolt of the machine gun, and he slowly brought it to bear on the coconut grove. The rustling grew louder; it seemed as if some men were creeping through the brush on the other side of the river to a point opposite his gun. Croft swallowed once. All of his senses were intensely alive—tiny charges seemed to pulse through his limbs and his head was as empty and shockingly aware as if it had been plunged into a pail of freezing water. He wet his lips and shifted his position slightly, feeling as if he could hear the flexing of his muscles and bone.

The Japanese mortar fired again and he started. The shells were falling by the next platoon; the sound was painful, jarring to him. He stared out on the moonlit river until his eyes started to deceive him; he was beginning to think he could see the heads of men in the dark swirls of the current. Croft gazed down at his knees for a few instants and then across the river again. He looked a little to the left or right of where he thought the Japanese might be; from long experience he had learned that you could not look directly at an object and see it in the darkness. Something seemed to move in the grove, and a new trickle of sweat formed and rolled down his back. He felt it become absorbed by his shirt and he twisted uncomfortably. Croft felt unbearably tense, but the sensation was not wholly unpleasant.

He wondered if Wilson had noticed the sounds, and then in answer to his question there was the loud unmistakable clicking of a machine gun bolt. To Croft's keyed senses the sound seemed to echo up and down the river, and he felt a spasm of rage that Wilson should have revealed his position. The rustling in the brush became louder and Croft was convinced he could hear some voices whispering on the other side of the river. He felt for a grenade and placed it at his feet.

Then he heard a sound which pierced his flesh. Someone called from across the river, "Yank, Yank!" Croft sat numbly. The voice was thin and high-pitched; it sounded hideous in a whisper. "That's a Jap," Croft told himself. He was incapable of moving for that instant.

"Yank!" It was calling to him. "Yank, we you coming-to-get, Yank."

The night lay like a heavy stifling mat over the river. Croft tried to breathe.

"We you coming-to-get, Yank."

Croft felt as if a hand had suddenly clapped against his back, travelled up his spine over his neck and skull to clutch at the hair on his forehead. "Coming to get you, Yank," he heard himself whisper. He had the hopeless agonizing frustration of a man in a nightmare who wanted to scream and could not utter a sound. He felt as if a powerful pump was whirling the blood at a maddening rate through his head. "We you *coming-to-get,* Yank."

He shivered terribly for a moment, and his hands seemed congealed on the machine-gun. He could not bear the intense pressure in his head.

"We you coming-to-get, Yank," the voice screamed.

"COME AND GET ME YOU SONS OF BITCHES," Croft roared.

He shouted with every fiber of his body as if he had plunged himself at an oaken door, when the echoes of his voice disappeared, he was spent.

There was no sound at all for perhaps ten seconds, nothing but the moonlight on the river and the taut rapt buzzing of the crickets. Then the voice spoke again. "Oh, we come, Yank, we come."

Croft pulled back the bolt on his machine-gun, and rammed it home. His heart was still beating with frenzy. "Recon . . . RECON, UP ON THE LINE," he shouted with all of his strength.

A machine-gun lashed at him from across the river, and he ducked in his hole. In the darkness it spat a vindictive white light like an acetylene torch, and its sound was terrifying as if it were directed completely toward him. Croft was holding himself together by the sheer force of his will. He pressed the trigger of his gun and it leaped and bucked under his hand. The tracers spewed wildly into the jungle on the other side of the river.

But the noise and the vibration of his gun had calmed him. He directed it to where he had seen the Japanese gun fire, and loosed a volley. The handle pounded against his fist like a piston, and he tried to steady it with both hands. The hot metallic smell of the barrel eddied back to him, and made what he was doing seem real again. He ducked in his hole waiting for the reply, winced involuntarily as the bullets whipped past.

"BEE-YOWWWW! . . . BEE-YOWWWW!" Some dirt snapped at his face from the ricochets. Croft was not conscious of feeling it; he had the surface numbness that a man has in a fight. He flinched at sounds, his mouth tightened and loosened, his eyes stared, showed fear and then anger, but he was oblivious to his body; a cold electric part of his mind seemed to be directing his actions.

Croft fired the gun again, held it for a long vicious burst, and then ducked in his hole. An awful scream singed the night, and for an instant Croft grinned weakly. "Got him," he thought. He was seeing the metal burning through flesh, shattering the bones in its path. "AIIIYOHHHHH," the scream froze him again, and for an odd disconnected instant he saw again the whole complex of sounds and smells and sights when a calf was branded. "RECON, UP . . . UP," he shouted furiously, and fired steadily for ten seconds to cover their advance. As he paused he could hear some men crawling behind him, and he whispered, "Recon?"

"Yeah," Gallagher dropped in the hole with him. "Mother of Mary," he muttered. Croft could feel him shaking beside him.

"Stop it!" He gripped his arm tensely. "The other men up?"

"Yeah."

Croft looked across the river again. Everything was silent, and the disconnected abrupt spurts of fire seemed forgotten now and disembodied, like vanished sparks from a grindstone. Now, when he was no longer alone, Croft was able to plan. The fact that men were up with him now, were scattered in the brush along the beach between their two machine-guns, recovered Croft's sense of command. "They're going to attack soon," he whispered hoarsely in Gallagher's ear.

Gallagher trembled again. "Ohh. No way to wake up," he tried to say, but his voice kept lapsing on him.

"Look," Croft whispered, "creep along the line, and tell them to hold fire until the Japs start to cross river."

"I can't, I can't," Gallagher whispered. "My legs won't work."

Croft felt like striking him. "Go!" he whispered.

"I can't."

The Jap machine-gun lashed at them from across the river. The bullets went singing into the jungle behind them, ripping at leaves. The tracers looked like red splints of lightning as they flattened into the jungle. A thousand rifles seemed to be firing at them from across the river, and the two men pressed themselves against the bottom of the hole. The sounds cracked against their eardrums and Croft's head was painful; firing the machine-gun had partially deafened him. "BEE-YOWWWW!" A ricochet slapped some more dirt on top of them. Croft felt it pattering on his back this time. He was trying to sense the moment when he would have to raise his head and fire the gun. The firing seemed to slacken, and he lifted his eyes cautiously. "BE-YOWWW, BEE-YOWWWW!" He dropped in the hole again. The Japanese machine-gun raked through the brush at them.

There was the shrill screaming sound of an automobile about to crash, and the men covered their heads with their arms. "BAA-ROWWMM, BAA-ROWMM, ROWMM, ROWMM." The mortars exploded all about them, and Gallagher felt something pick him up, shake him, and then release him. "Oh, God," he cried. He felt a clod of dirt on his neck. "BAA-ROWMM, BAA-ROWMMMM."

"Jesus, I'm hit," someone screamed, "I'm hit. Something hit me."

"BAA-ROWMM."

Gallagher rebelled against the awful force of the explosions, and then relapsed feebly. For the first time in years he remembered what he had said as a child when he slowly slipped away under ether. "Stop, I can't do anything about it," he screamed. "Stop! Stop! . . . I can't do anything about it." At that instant he no longer knew whether it was ether or the shelling which made him cry out.

"BAA-ROWMM, BAA-ROWMM."

"I'm hit, I'm hit," someone was screaming. The Japanese rifles were firing again. Croft lay on the floor of the hole with his hands against the ground and every muscle poised in its place.

"BAA-ROWMM." The shrapnel made singing sounds as it scattered itself through the foliage.

Croft picked up his flare gun. The firing had not abated, but through it he had heard someone shouting in Japanese. He pointed the gun in the air.

There was a shout and the firing stopped.

"Here they come," Croft said.

He fired the flare, and shouted, "STOP 'EM WHEN THEY COME!"

A shrill quivering cry came out of the jungle across the river. It was like the scream a man might utter if his foot were being crushed. "AAAAIIIIIII, AAAAIIIII."

The flare burst at the moment the Japanese started their charge. Croft had a split perception of the Japanese machine-gun firing from a flank, and then he began to fire his, deeply and automatically, not looking where he fired, but holding it low, swinging it like a whip from side to side. He could not hear the other guns fire, but he saw their muzzle blasts like exhausts.

He had a startling frozen picture of the Japanese running toward him across the narrow river. "AAAAIIIIIIIIIH," he heard again. In the light of the flare the Japanese had the stark frozen quality of men revealed by a shaft of lightning. Croft no longer felt anything clearly; he could not have said at that moment where his hands ended and the machine-gun began; he was lost in a vast rumbling moil of noise out of which individual screams and shouts etched in his mind for an instant. He saw Japanese soldiers writhe and fall before his fire like timbers collapsing in a burning building. He could never have counted the Japanese who charged across the river; he knew only that his finger was rigid on the trigger-bar. He could not have loosened it. In those few moments he felt no sense of danger at all. He just kept firing.

The line of men who charged across the river began to fall. In the water they were slowed considerably and the concentrated fire from Recon's side of the bank raged at them like a wind across an open field. They began to stumble over the bodies ahead of them. Croft saw one soldier reach into the air behind another's body as if he were trying to clutch something in the sky and Croft fired at him for what seemed many seconds before the arm collapsed.

He looked to the right and saw about three men trying to cross the river where it turned and ran parallel to the bluff. He swung the gun about and began to lash them with it. One man fell, and the other two paused uncertainly and then began to run back toward their own bank of the river. Croft had no time to follow them; some soldiers had reached the beach on his side and were charging the gun. He fired point-blank at them, and they collapsed about five yards from his hole.

Croft had no time to think; he fired and fired, shifting targets with the quick leaping reflexes of an athlete shifting for a ball. He saw men falling here and there, and immediately he would switch to another group. The line of Japanese broke into little bunches of men who wavered, and then began to retreat.

The light of the flare went out and Croft was blinded for a moment. There was no sound again in the darkness and he fumbled for another flare with an almost desperate urgency. "Where is it?" he whispered to Gallagher.

"What?"

"Shit." Croft's hand found the flare box, and he loaded the gun again. He was beginning to be able to see in the darkness once more and he hesitated. Something moved out in the river and he fired the flare. As it burst a few Japanese soldiers were caught motionless in the middle of the river. Croft pivoted his gun on them and fired. One of the soldiers remained standing for an incredible time. There was no expression on his face; he looked vacant and surprised even as the bullets struck him in the chest.

Nothing was moving now on the river. In the light of the flare the bodies looked limp and utterly unhuman like bags of grain. One soldier began to float downstream, his face in the water. On the beach near the gun, another Japanese soldier was lying on his back. A wide stain of blood was spreading out from his body, and his stomach which was ripped open looked like the swollen entrails of a fowl. On an impulse Croft fired a burst into him, and felt a twitch of pleasure as he saw the body quiver.

A wounded man was groaning in Japanese. Every few seconds he would scream and the sound was a little terrifying in the cruel pale-blue light of the flare. Croft picked up a grenade. "That son of a bitch is makin' too much noise," he said. He pulled the pin, and lobbed the grenade over to the opposite bank. It dropped like a bean-bag on one of the bodies, and Croft pulled Gallagher down with him. The explosion was powerful and yet empty like a blast that collapses window-panes. After a moment, the sounds ceased.

Croft tensed himself and listened to the sounds from across the river. There was the quiet furtive noise of men retreating into the jungle. "GIVE 'EM A VOLLEY," he shouted.

All the men in Recon began to fire again, and Croft raked the jungle again for a minute in short bursts. He could hear Wilson's machine gun pounding steadily. "I guess we gave 'em something," Croft told Gallagher. The flare was going out, and Croft stood up for a moment. "Who was hit," he shouted.

"Toglio."

"Bad?" Croft asked.

"I'm okay," Toglio whispered. "I got a bullet in my shoulder."

"Can you wait till morning?"

There was silence for a moment, and then Toglio answered weakly, "Yeah, I'll be okay."

Croft got out of his hole. "I'm coming down," he announced. "Hold your fire." He walked quietly along the path until he reached Toglio. Red and Goldstein were kneeling beside him, and Croft spoke to them in a low voice. "Pass this on," he said. "We're all gonna stay in our holes until mornin'. I don't think they'll be back tonight, but you cain't tell. And no one is gonna fall asleep. They's only about an hour till dawn, so you ain't got nothin' to piss about."

"I wouldn't go to sleep anyway," Goldstein breathed. "What a way to wake up." It was the same thing Gallagher had said.

"Yeah, well I just wasn't ridin' on my ass either waitin' for them to come," Croft said. He shivered for a moment in the early morning air, and realized with a pang of regret and shame that for the first time in his life he had been really afraid. "The sons-of-bitchin' Japs," he said. His legs felt tired and he turned to go back to his gun. "I hate the bastards," he said to himself, and felt a trifle weak before the terrible spasm of rage which worked its way through his tired body.

"One of these days I'm gonna really get me a Jap," he whispered aloud. The river was slowly carrying the bodies downstream.

"At least," Gallagher said, "if we got to stay here a couple of days, the mother-fuggers won't be stinkin' up the joint."

MORALS AND MR. WYLIE

by Robert M. Adams

I

THE leading American moralist drawing royalties today is Philip Wylie. Exclusive of serialization, translation, reprint rights, and possible sales to movies, his first volume of morality has already sold over one hundred thousand copies; and his second is even now making its appearance among the best-sellers. No doubt Ralph Waldo Emerson and Jesus Christ somewhat surpass Mr. Wylie in total sales; but, as is well known, the works of both these authors are now in the public domain.

Considered merely as business ventures, therefore, the works of Mr. Wylie are worthy of investigation. How has he transformed the dull and prosy business of morality into a paying proposition? Are we indebted to him for a new product or for a new packaging technique? Does he sell honest goods under honest labels?

Ample material to investigate these problems is now to hand. *Generation of Vipers* has been on the booksellers' shelves since 1942; *An Essay on Morals,* described as Mr. Wylie's answer to questions aroused by the earlier book, was allotted a $7,500 advertising budget on the publisher's spring, 1947 list. A third volume may well be necessary or convenient, sometime in the future, to explain the former two. Still, five hundred and sixty-one pages of moral diatribe should provide a fair sampling of any man's thought. If it is still too early to pass final judgment, we may get a good provisional line on what Mr. Wylie is up to.

II

THE most obvious quality of Mr. Wylie's morals is its technique of chiaroscuro, the combination of morbid gloom with electric-light optimism. Though he is sure our ship will come in somehow, Mr. Wylie does not think highly of the crew. In a single volume of three hundred and forty-one pages he calls his fellow men, among other things, boobs, boobies, bantam-brains, poops, micropoops, dunderheads, pinheads, dollar-chasers, exponents of emotion and hysteria, stricken nonmen, louts, stoopnagels, simpering or clamorous windbags, anointed prickamice, macaroons, little foxes, slobs, desk cowboys, tweedy or interfering morons, flat-hat feudalists, flat-hat fascisti, quacks, trumpeters, faddists, popeyed wights, dopes, gibbons, goons, gunmen, pimps, pompous male sluts, quasi males, abject dupes, pipsqueaks, pulpitatious pipsqueaks, squirting extroverts, detestable sycophants, wizards, witch-doctors, oafs, jerks, mongrel jerks, cruel bumpkins, fagins, dancing savages, eighth graders with hair over their ears, gangsters, perverts, thugs, desperate jackanapes, bullies, scumskulls, unholy rascals, piddle-brained citizens, nawabs, pantswetting nice Nellies, fusty witch-men, and lifelong sucking-eggs. Words like these, repeated frequently, add a distinct flavor to Mr. Wylie's prose style. The most innocuous ideas, packaged in such garish phrases, must make a good show in the literary market-place.

The words are violent; yet the effect, in the end, is one of calculation rather than passion. For a man in honest passion has no need to do so much flexing of his literary torso. Mr. Wylie, who indicts the architecture of Washington, D.C., the American matriarchy, Science, and Religion, in identical inflated phraseology, is evidently exercising with literary Indian clubs. They whirl and twirl about his head very impressively; prodigies of skill and energy are clearly being performed before our very eyes; but the demonstration is a little formal to be evidence of passion. A desire to dazzle the yokelry in the $2.75 box seats will account for a good deal of the coloring of Mr. Wylie's writing.

This dazzling display is, of course, a device consciously employed for the good of the yokelry. Mr. Wylie says explicitly that he uses "literary devices intended to affect the feelings, by the deliberate injection of libido into values"—in plain language, he calls names on purpose. He claims the technique is legitimate for exhortatory writing; and so indeed it is, when an author intends to shock the complacent into an understanding of new problems. Only, if there is no understanding behind the language, it may, instead of arousing its victims, frustrate, disappoint, and mislead them. Let us explore the ideas behind Mr. Wylie's language, then, to see what understanding he has to offer.

He says, in the first place, that American society is sick; and, without looking too deeply into the difference between sick and healthy societies, or asking which ones are less and which more sick, we may agree with him.

America is sick; and Mr. Wylie tells us further, that because Americans are complacent, they do not realize how sick they are. Here too, though he overstates his case, we may concede that in general he is right. But the complacency rises, not so much from ignorance, as confusion. That we are sick of various diseases many people tell us daily. The critical voice is undoubtedly pitched low by comparison with the shrill tones of boosterism. But it would be loud and clear enough, if only it spoke with a single emphasis, to a single conclusion. The general fact is clear—America is sick; but sick of what disease and why? There's the rub. If the diagnoses could be made to agree, most Americans would be quicker to undertake a cure.

Now if this difficulty were to be overcome with loud words and the deliberate injection of libido into values, Mr. Wylie would have good reason to use language as he does. But problems are not understood, much less solved, in this way, and to suggest that they are is to commit a fraud on honest readers. Philip Wylie commits many such frauds. His analysis of our problems consists of fragmentary, superficial, pretentious, inaccurate, obfuscatory jargon. The remedies which he proposes are impractical, irrelevant, or of unproved value.

III

LET us look at the indictment, article by article. Philip Wylie's analysis is fragmentary because in over five hundred pages devoted to the mental health of the nation, he barely mentions one, and never discusses at all the other, of America's two major irrational phobias. The psychotic terror of Communists which characterizes many Americans he mentions only in passing. He says the Communists have brought this phobia on themselves by their attempts to banish instinct—though he says Behaviorists, Pragmatists, and Mechanists are also busily trying to banish the same instinct, and the lack of an anti-Pragmatist phobia might seem to call for some explanation. The phobia against Negroes, which afflicts more of our citizens than any other single fixation, he never mentions at all. He says we should all learn that we have Jewish and Negro blood in our veins—a fact dubiously true and not at all relevant to the question of equality among different races. In short, Mr. Wylie is on the side of the angels, more or less.

But his method, we shall be told, is to choose "specimen" myths, attitudes, and institutions, and a man who works from specimens may choose them arbitrarily. The claim is fraudulent, for his cant about "specimens" does not prevent Mr. Wylie from treating any subject he finds convenient or fashionable—witness his attacks on automobiles, architecture, Dorothy Thompson, soap operas, battleship admirals, and many other matters doubtfully relevant to America's mental health. But, even granting him this point, Mr. Wylie has treated his chosen themes with sad superficiality. The failure of education is, he declares, the fault of educators, who for their sins should be given the noose and faggot. That there is anything more to the problem than the single factor, stupid men in the universities, he scarcely ever suggests. This is evidence of extraordinary naïveté or extraordinary carelessness. Our author's thinking on other topics is consistently slipshod and incoherent after this manner. He denounces, with all the appearances of vigor, the heterosexual promiscuity of Americans, and follows this passage with one pleading for a more rational, scientific attitude toward homosexuals. He writes with notable calm and objectivity on the fallacies of anti-Semitism, but waxes rabid against Catholicism. On one page he writes against free public education for all, and on the next in praise of democratic opportunities for everyone. Only a man who is by nature shallow and unreflective commits logical blunders of this quality.

Mr. Wylie's pretensions are enormous, and largely unjustified. In behalf of his approach, he lays claim to all the virtues of scientific method. Whether he knows it or not, scientific method involves the quantitative, experimental verification of hypotheses; and Mr. Wylie makes no use whatever of this technique in his own work. He shuns the exact statistic, and rushes off in pursuit of the slapdash estimate. He makes much of the idea that an educated man can discriminate between real facts and arbitrary ideas, opinions, rules, and prejudices; yet he is capable of making the flat, unqualified statement that "half man's physical ills come from his psyche," without indicating in any way that this is an opinion, not a fact, and an opinion founded upon no precise, detailed information whatever. Indeed, he builds a good part of his argument on this unproved assertion that "half" or "a majority" (he does not distinguish between the two estimates) of man's physical ills are wholly psychological in origin.

Mr. Wylie's psychology is of a piece with the rest of his specious thinking. He tells us that man's instinct, about which he has learned from Karl Jung, is the fundamental law of life, and that knowledge of this fact is very useful to us. But how does he define "instinct"? Why, simply as "the energy, and the organization of energy, which governs (*sic*!) living behavior in individuals, species, and in evolution." A careful reader will wonder what is the distinction between living behavior in evolution and living behavior in individuals and species. But setting this point aside, let us observe that the word "instinct" is here defined by the very attributes Mr. Wylie is trying to establish—as if a man, arguing that witchcraft produces the common cold, should define witchcraft simply as "that force which produces the common cold." The logic is that of a puppy chasing his tail.

Mr. Wylie also makes much of a law of opposites, which seems to be an aspect of Hegelian dialectic, and which he says will give us enormous understanding of our lives. But the only use to which he actually puts this law is to associate *opposites* with *complements,* a concept at least two millennia old. He tells us, indeed, that if we consciously choose to follow one "archetype," we will inevitably suffer in our subconscious "an equal and opposite instinct-counterbalance." If we try to be brave like soldiers, we will have a sudden access of subconscious fear; if we try to be pure, we will suffer from concealed, lascivious desires. Undoubtedly subconscious compensations do exist, and just conceivably there may be some such balance of forces as will justify the adjectives "equal" and "opposite." Mr. Wylie, however, shows no proof of any of these facts; and even if he had proved his case to the hilt, his law offers no escape. We might perhaps elude the pattern of instinctual compulsion by choosing a little influence of each of our archetypes. By being a little bit Don Juan and a little bit John the Baptist, Oedipus one day and Orpheus the next, we might thus succeed in giving ourselves thirty little neuroses instead of one big one, and a case of perennial adolescence in the bargain. Or we might, on the other hand, pick and choose among our archetypes according to some peculiarly desirable criterion. Mr. Wylie in fact fumbles and palters over this dilemma, now telling us to do one thing and now the other, till an honest mind cannot help seeing that the pidgin about archetypes and opposites—whatever its honest value—is, as Mr. Wylie presents it, for the revitalization of our psyches, sheer pretentious tripe. Thus the mountains labor and give birth to a mouse.

(Speaking of mountains, Mr. Wylie takes a page-and-a-half flyer at nominalism when he tells us that the Atlas Mountains are real, but Oregon is a myth because it could be changed by revolution, a referendum, or enemy action. A more amazing definition of reality would be hard to find; but slapping down offhand judgments on deep subjects, like hundred-dollar bills on a Bowery bar, is part of Mr. Wylie's method. It takes no expert to find most of them counterfeit.)

Allied to pretension is inaccuracy. I do not mean pompous and bombastic language, a subject worthy of separate treatment; but such matters as quoting incorrectly, getting specific facts wrong, and using the language in defiance of the rules of English grammar and common sense. For his own purposes, Mr. Wylie misquotes Abraham Lincoln's thin joke, "God must have loved the poor because he made so many of them." He takes the mythological stone from Sisyphus and gives it to Theseus. By accident, apparently, he mismanages the Latin tongue in referring to an argument "post hoc *sed non* propter hoc," argument "ad homin*u*m," a "*tabla* rasa" or even "*rosa*" (though perhaps we should chalk that last one up to the printer) and to a "descensus Avern*o*." His English prose is equally slapdash. For instance, he uses "congruent" for "analogous," "sedulously" for "credulously," "militaristic" for "military," "abyssal" for "abysmal," "exploitatious" for "exploitative," "pristine" for "prime," "overweaning" for "overweening," "foresworn" for "pledged in advance," "responsibleness" for "responsibility," "classical" for "theoretical," "contraposite" for "antithetical," "analogue" for "analogy," and "apperceive" for "perceive," "realize," or simply "see." He is capable of writing sentences containing two separate and unresolved ideas. ("The grisly corruption of labor, the indeterminate national outlook of the British leaders, the actual remoteness and irrelevance of numerous European squabbles, the occasionally rancid political history of Army veterans, the many sophistries and casuistries of Roosevelt, and the unrealistic diaperism of much of the New Deal are not and never will be adequate reasons for dying.") He is capable of writing sentences containing no idea at all. ("Insisting that their ends are holy because they are superficially unselfish, they also insist that any means justifies those ends." "But I will trade a professional team for my fun, in return to football-less colleges any day.") He repeatedly writes sentences in which a singular subject is linked with a plural verb, and vice-versa. Despite a great deal of dash and energy, he is not a great stylist. And the cumulative confusion rising from much bad grammar mingles with the confusion rising from muddled thinking, to the intelligent reader's dismay.

Mr. Wylie is addicted, above all, to bombastic and polysyllabic speech. Logorrhea, as he calls it, has a firm clutch on his mind. Even when hemmed in, cornered, and, it would seem, indispensably required to use a plain word, he often vaults the wall of English speech by inventing words of his own. The great value of such fancy language is to camouflage an idea paltry or inaccurate in itself. Hence "materiology," a hybrid of Greek and Latin, is used in the context, "our Western padishahs have about licked materiology," where the conventional term "physical science" would give away the whole sentence for the wretched, pretentious fraud it is. Hence also such mystical exhortations as that "a whole man can be produced only by four-dimensional preciseness and exactitude." Hence, finally, that lust after extra syllables which leads him to write of quarrels increasing in *perfervor, autoselected* spokesmen, an *imperished* rabble of minds, and a law to put physics under civilian *secrecies*. The well of English has rarely been more thoroughly defiled.

IV

Now if Philip Wylie is such a feeble pretender to clear and useful understanding, let us ask what it is that makes his books sell. Our answer will have to take into account two elements; the condition of the literary market-place and the people who frequent it, and the type of wares which Mr. Wylie offers for sale. The second element is the more easily disposed of.

The language of Philip Wylie's book is loud, and sounds unrestrained. It caters, thus, to a sort of hysteria peculiar to home-front and post-war America. The hysteria of war itself is a different matter, the emotion felt by those very close to battle, a savagery overstimulated rather than under-expressed. Post-war hysteria rises in part from the sudden absence of accustomed stimuli, from the sudden piling-up of new frustrations. No longer having an enemy to destroy, a country to rebuild, or a world position to regain, men are suddenly overwhelmed with the feeling, "Where do we go from here?" Blind blather and noisy denunciation offer some relief for these feelings. We should not be surprised to learn from his publishers that the great popularity of Mr. Wylie's first volume has developed since V-J Day, and more than three years after its publication.

In addition, Philip Wylie offers a thin veneer of sophisticated scepticism to persons in America who feel greatly in need of such a quality. After almost sixteen years of uninterrupted war and depression, the American middle classes have learned most of the negative, sceptical lessons of history. The search for faith was never more acute; precisely because, of late years, it has been so generally unsuccessful. In increasingly large numbers, the middle classes have learned to jeer at themselves, as well as everything else—not because they doubt and do not care, but because they need reassurance and are convinced they cannot find it. The wise guy is their chosen attitude; and since the wise guy is also Mr. Wylie's confessed vanity, shallow calls to shallow.

Mr. Wylie is also a popular writer because he offers cheap and easy solutions to difficult problems. Prostitution and sexual promiscuity are, for example, very serious problems by his canons. The one concrete solution he offers is this: to license whorehouses. This step, plus some unexplained, undescribed psychological revamping, will—but perhaps Mr. Wylie had better put it in his own words. "If our attitudes become realistic and our motives honest, we would soon exorcise from humanity the beast our own beastliness unchained. Man evolves upward to new verities. We stand in the presence of a new verity for our libido and our erotic behavior. . . . If we seize upon it, we can remove the fetid incrustations of ages from our sexual instinct; we can clean our bodies; we can discover a more honest principle for love. . . ."

Now the fallacy of this argument underlies so much of Mr. Wylie's thinking, and so much pseudo-religious thinking in general, that it is worth a few extra words. The argument assumes that a man who commits buggery in a spirit of passionate moral earnestness has not committed buggery but something else. No doubt Mr. Wylie, like every other moralist, would like to assure us that people who embrace his particular brand of moral earnestness will never commit buggery at all. But this view of human affairs is quite at variance with the wise-guy attitude. Wise guys would never swallow such hokum. So the argument must run that inward sincerity is good in itself, independent of its results. New names are thus made the solution for old problems. Buggery is not buggery any more. People who have looked over their archetypes, and oriented themselves harmoniously among them, become good people automatically. By such devices the naturally aristocratic and snobbish appeal of Mr. Wylie's morality is reinforced. A small number, he tells us, would make a small start at arresting the world's instinctual regression, and the time is always ripe.

V

HERE, at least, Mr. Wylie is terribly right; the time is ripe and over-ripe for an American, a world morality. The nation and the world are today in gruesome need of the sort of morality that Philip Wylie promises—promises, and does not provide. We share many responsibilities for things done, being done, and to be done; and for meeting such responsibilities, we are pitifully unprepared. That two continents are lying in shambles we can of course attribute exclusively to our defeated enemies. They forced us into war, and the ruins of Europe and Asia are merely the necessary price of our own survival. (So we may say, without fear of successful contradiction, at least so long as we occupy the countries which would be interested in contradicting us. While we are policing them, it will be well to forget our part in the dirty peace-making business which followed the first World War, and the part our appeasement played in making the second.) But no such pious handwashing will rid us of the awful responsibility we now hold—responsibility toward ourselves as well as the rest of humanity, for ending the iron age of depression and war, which is the only world most of us know.

Getting an uncontrolled, runaway economy under moral restraint is thus the central moral problem of our times. And our "morality" (that strange anomaly comprising abstention-from-sex-except-in-wedlock, plus certain homilies for repetition on Sunday), has not the intellectual teeth to bite into this problem, even supposing its exponents wanted to. As Mr. Tawney has pointed out in brilliant detail, our Protestant capitalist forebears were the first to start loosening the moral bag in which our feline acquisitive instincts were kept. They stretched it here, enlarged it there, and soon found the cat was out altogether. He has grown by now to such a tigerish creature that we must either recapture him or be eaten up. The bag still remains with us, but strangely shrunk, tattered, almost vestigial—and he is a confident man who expects it to hold kittens or young mice, let alone catamounts.

The limitations of laissez-faire morality (or lack of morality) are evidenced by the vast new areas of responsibility which have opened up wholly outside any but the vaguest moral formulations. Our attention is riveted to them every day by new hammer-strokes. They are problems which meet us as inevitably as the morning sun; and to which morality, as we know it, can offer only a faltering evasion. What shall we do about crossing picket-lines? What about inflation? Black markets? What about the closed shop? What about foreign policy, just and unjust wars, just and unjust peaces? What about the atom bomb?

As a symbol of our dilemma—probably only a temporary symbol—the bomb is compulsive precisely because it poses the old problem with a new time-limit. We will not give away our new plaything, we dare not use it, we cannot hold onto it. With a tiger by the tail, a paper bag in our free hand, and some obsolete treatises on kitten-culture clenched between our teeth, we wait mutely; and our glassy eyes search the scenery frantically for a god to step out of the machine and save us. Echoing from the blank walls of morality, a great many voices address us with good advice; but even in our desperation, we know they are only the voices of prejudice, interest, or habit, and not of understanding.

If nothing else, the public response to Philip Wylie's trashy books would teach us how enormous is the compulsion on American society to look for something better than our fathers' "morality." Our society is engaged heart-and-soul in this search; and it is useful to note what Mr. Wylie must offer us, to secure our interest. His morality is, he says, scientific, based on the scientific method fully applied. This idea he repeatedly emphasizes; and much of his attack on the churches derives its point from the desire to appear scientific. In fixing this label to his volumes, Mr. Wylie appeals to a healthy and widespread instinct. It is good that men realize the possibility of, and the need for, scientific thinking in relation to morals. It is good because scientific thinking is responsible thinking, which founds itself upon facts and can be tested by reference to facts. Held against the keen edge of a fact, Mr. Wylie's lucubrations crumble to bits; but the desire for a morality which will stand up against facts is a sound and constructive one, which I dare to think can be satisfied.

A single, sizable fact is, indeed, a touchstone amply sensitive to distinguish genuine from shoddy morality. A great, obvious fact about our society is, for instance, that it is becoming increasingly collectivist. TNEC and FTC reports prove the growing centralization of business control; business complains of labor monopoly; and everyone remarks on the increasing centralization of government. The facts are undeniable; they are undenied; they are of enormous significance to every practical moralist. I do not mean that collectivism must be accepted as an inevitable tendency, though the point is certainly open for argument. But at least the fact forces us to place our morals in a scale of rational dimensions. If they are to oppose collectivism and advocate individualism, let us require that our moralists keep in mind how big a job it is to reverse a century of world history. Let them imitate human prudence in every other field, and calculate both the size of the job and the forces available to accomplish it, before they start telling the human race what to do.

Schemers of moral reform, in proportion as they are grandiose in their objectives, are traditionally apt to rely upon incongruously meager means. A man who proposes the universal improvement of the human race will feel no embarrassment about casually consigning the task to a few hundred or thousand enlightened cohorts. But if his object is to remove stray dogs from the streets of his town, he will be apt to give a good deal of thought to the dogcatcher and his salary, the construction of an adequate pound, necessary arrangements with the Humane Society, and other factors likely to impede or advance his labors.

Philip Wylie is thus in an ancient and honorable tradition, when he blithely consigns the fate of America and the world to the care of the psychiatrists and teachers. Neither group, however, is likely to be flattered by its new position. The psychiatrists have in fact just let it be known that they do not feel equal, as yet, to solving all the problems of medical education, juvenile delinquency, criminology, sociology, penology, public life, and international affairs. They point out that learning physical medicine alone is a four-to-six-year job, ample to occupy any one man without the addition of any half-dozen new disciplines; and that, though a psychiatrist may and must have legitimate interests in many fields, he cannot be an expert in all. They add, with admirable honesty, that the techniques, subject matter, and indeed the very basic definitions of psychiatry are still matters of dispute; and that, until they are clarified, psychiatry will be amply occupied in cultivating its own particular garden. Two other statistics may be relevant. There are, at present, in our nation of one hundred forty million people about four thousand accredited psychiatrists, of whom only three hundred or so are psychotherapists. In other words, there is a little better than one psychoanalyst to every half-million people. The average psychiatrist is unlikely to charge less than ten dollars per hour; a figure which very few (less than five per cent certainly) of the population can afford to pay regularly on the minimal weekly basis.

The teachers, though more numerous, are in much the same fix. While turning out technicians for an industrial plant, scientific farmers, a professional class, wise legislators, and unselfish public servants, they are also being asked to preserve the cultural heritage of the past, lead the scientific advances of the future, do away with crime, sexual maladjustment, and ignorance of arithmetic, in addition to promoting a broad understanding of international issues in their spare time—all on less than two per cent of the national budget. (This less-than-two per cent figure is not a merely economic statistic; it expresses also the public contempt, resulting in demoralization of the profession, which makes leadership on major social issues a ludicrous concept.) The whole idea of teaching social reforms in classrooms just doesn't add up, in terms of practical morality; and the fact is, that anyone who offers to achieve a new world by these means is dealing out a cuff-full of jokers. Either the ends he sets up or the means he proposes are not, in practical fact, what he says they are; for in the market, the court of law, and the forum of life itself, where any set of practical morals is put to the test, both cannot possibly consist together. Teachers, psychiatrists, lawyers, clergymen—the intellectual classes generally—are the first to realize that they are not and cannot be dictators of public behavior. At most, they can slightly adapt and redirect trends which are ultimately independent of their efforts.

Moral freedom is thus the recognition of necessity as well as of choice; and practical morals are as legitimately concerned with the inevitable conditions of our life as with the options we exercise within it. In fact, recognition of these conditions is a prerequisite for effective thinking of any sort.

The standards set here for moral philosophy are high, but not impracticably high. We are dealing only with gross fallacies. The joker in Philip Wylie's morality is not very carefully concealed, or very hard to uncover. It has been played before, to the point where it is rather battered around the edges. In our society there is only one class which seriously, regularly puts up much of an argument for individualism as a social principle. That is of course the business community and its apologists, the group which, coincidentally, has itself gone furthest down the road to monopoly and collectivism. This contradiction results in some strange definitions, which have been commonplaces of critical thought in America since the days of *Babbitt.* To the business community individualism is paramount and nonconformity is anathema. Civil rights are an irritating fuzz of words, behind which nonconformists lurk, but democracy is a word of self-congratulation. Compulsion, especially by government, is a bad thing; but unemployment is a useful club with which to beat nonconformists. "Freedom from any but economic compulsion" is the strange device their banner bears; and though Mr. Wylie himself never raises this particular slogan, to what other group can he seriously hope to appeal, when this is the program he presents? His own undemocratic quirks, in favor of restricting the franchise and the right to education, merely confirm our impression of his original bias. Frank admission of that bias would make much clearer what he is trying to do, and who likes it, and why.

Mr. Wylie would no doubt heatedly deny that he has intended to forge a weapon for anyone's use. So be it. On the matter of his own intentions he is of course the ultimate authority. Let us notice only that he has created a body of doctrines with many sharp edges, activist in tendency, idealist in character, making unlimited claims to revitalize our life and to transcend all previous creeds, logics, and standards of ethical behavior. Either by accident or deliberate provision, this keen-edged intellectual machine is adapted by many circumstances (expense, complexity, fewness of practitioners, and so on) to the use of a single class; and this class, beyond all others, is today tormented with terror of its enemies and doubt of its destiny. If under these circumstances somebody gets cut, how can it be called an accident?

VI

All practical moralities necessarily serve practical purposes; but not all moralists are as shame-faced and confused about the fact as is Mr. Wylie, for not all have the same jokers to conceal. Remarkable frankness in fact characterizes a morality which has been evolving slowly and awkwardly in unconscious opposition to that of Philip Wylie and other semi-authoritarian quacks. In combination with PAC, the trade-union movement in America presents the outstanding example of men creating a practical morality. If only in their campaign to encourage registration and voting, where they have emphasized to millions the responsibilities and opportunities of citizenship, the unions have done more than a dozen academies or a carload of psychiatrists. They have laid the foundations of a working ethic.

Those who are used to morals with an ecclesiastical smack to them will not make much of union morals. They deal with unfamiliar topics in an unfamiliar way. They frankly combine the appeal to men's minds with the appeal to their pockets. But morality is an inevitable basis and an inevitable result of union work. The common title which unions take, of "brotherhoods," shows a basic orientation away from the "morality" of dog-eat-dog. An obvious form of moral sanction imposed by unions is strike discipline. Work-discipline generally is less spectacular, but just as effective, and in its cumulative influence more important. The odium which attaches to discrimination among union members, and to union-splitting activities generally, is an enormous force in favor of sex-equality, racial understanding, and color-democracy. The experience of self-government in the management of union affairs is an influence not to be overlooked. As their place in the nation's political life expands and becomes traditional, we may expect the unions to develop more complex and comprehensive moral and political standards, capable of being applied to more critical problems. The experience of Britain points in this direction. Unions cannot bag the acquisitive cat at one stroke but they are fundamentally concerned with clipping his claws.

The outraged wails which have risen against PAC and trade-union politics generally, are excellent testimonials to their effectiveness; and the secret of that effectiveness is well described by one specific wail in particular. The trade unions, we are told, are made up in equal proportions of radicals and racketeers—men interested in ideologies and men interested in money. Precisely so. The terminology is not very pretty; but the fact is undoubted. Men who are interested in getting higher wages are called racketeers, and men who are interested in economic and political democracy are called radicals; and the combination of both in one movement makes for effective and practical moral standards. That these standards are obnoxious to people with a wagepayer's point of view and an interest in freedom for scabs goes without saying.

I am not of course implying that trade unions are without fault or flaw; practical moralists do not expect to find human institutions in that condition. I mean only that the trade-union movement and its political allies have begun building a morality which is practical in its working, taking account of the inevitable conditions of life; and which is at least potentially capable of grappling with the major problems of our society. Very few people have ever tried to express its precepts, which are largely pragmatic in their sanctions; it may be doubted if codification would do much good, for where practical men are working with theoreticians, too much precision is neither desired nor expected.

Trade-union morality is not flashy; it has not yet even claimed to be a morality. Like every other ethic, it is subject to occasional self-contradiction and confusion; and trade unions, like trade unionists, do not always live up to it. Their failures very often go unpunished. In these respects, British and Continental trade unions are generally far ahead of our own, though still far short of the ideal. To many problems, trade-union morality offers no answers, and on many issues it comes in conflict with the platitudes of "morality." But the fact is, that despite all these faults and all this incompleteness, it has won the allegiance of men. It is a working morality, as Mr. Wylie's is not. Men live by it. And that is reason enough for optimism and effort on the part of those who see its faults and conflicts as the necessary incidents of rude and vigorous life. If its branches are sparse or fruitless, the owners may graft new ones to it; but another root, so healthy and so deeply sunk in popular feeling, will be hard to find.

Strange, wonderful, and timely is the new ignorance. Conservatives, of all people, are these days turning from ideas of growth, process, and slow social change, toward the glib, specious plan, the untried universal nostrum. If the devil can quote Scripture to his purpose, a liberal under these circumstances may try his hand at Burke.

> The science of constructing a commonwealth, or renovating it, or reforming it, is, like every other experimental science, not to be taught *a priori*. Nor is it a short experience that can instruct us in that practical science; because the real effects of moral causes are not always immediate, but that which in the first instance is prejudicial may be excellent in its remoter operation . . . and very plausible schemes, with very pleasing commencements, have often shameful and lamentable conclusions.

This is not an occasion to bandy names or raise a shriek over political shadows cast on the ground. So far as Philip Wylie has honestly opposed bigotry and self-satisfaction, we should honor him. But if the ultimate end of his pleasing and plausible schemes is only the establishment of a deeper, more limited smugness of his own, he deserves no thanks of anyone. I submit that the viper-oil which Mr. Wylie peddles is more virulent stuff than most of the poisons which he offers to counteract with it. Mingled with many-colored fluids, shaken up by a salesman with a pleasing line of patter, and advertised as the drink of sophisticates, it is undeniably potent brew. But it has the same qualities as rotgut everywhere; if it does not kill you, it will make you blind.

THE CLASSIC OR NOTHING

by Isidor Schneider

Except in certain small, atypical, primitive social groups where distinction is openly shunned and the avoidance is publicly expected and indulged, it is a universal social convention to reject the mediocre. Mediocrity has become quite as hedged around with hypocrisies as sex. The word, itself, has almost ceased to define a condition and serves almost entirely as invective.

In the arts this attitude has taken a particularly exaggerated form. From it arises one of the dilemmas of criticism. It is difficult to place a work of art where it most often belongs, in the teeming quarters of mediocrity. To do it that justice is to do it an injustice, since to pronounce a work mediocre is to pronounce its death sentence.

It has become practically a rule in esthetic criticism that only the exceptional may be accorded status as art at all. Judgments are pronounced as if mediocre art were a self-cancelling contradiction. As a result we have no rational consideration of mediocre art which necessarily constitutes the bulk of the art of any given time; and our critics veer between jolly Woollcotts, who gush over daily "masterpieces" because nothing they enjoy must be admitted to be mediocre, and grim Haggins, who see mediocrity everywhere, and virtually nothing fit to bear the holy name of art.

One source of this anguished dread of mediocrity is the general frustration that makes life appear to be fulfilled only on the top. It is with top things, therefore, that people seek to identify themselves, in their conscious choices. Add to this the instinctive efforts to preserve the personality from complete submergence in the majority, and the impulse of those afflicted with inferiority feelings to compensate by winning distinctions. The latter takes many normally retiring people into the arts, where they become vociferous in their challenges and confessions.

Then there are social factors which turn into psychological factors. Machine production, by eliminating the craftsman, eliminated the human link between production and art. The term, "commercial art," only too accurately expressed the new relationship. It put before the artist the alternative of degrading his art or living outside the productive system.

In the graphic arts those who turned to "commercial art" viewed it, personally, as the end of art for them. Most of them gave up being even "Sunday painters." The majority of those who refuse to do "commercial art" live in dependence on wives, relatives and friends. Recognition sufficient to bring them a livelihood seldom comes before their forties or fifties. Thus, through their prime, adult years, they live as dependents. No amount of sensitiveness and love can keep dependence in an adult from being an abnormality. The childish or child-like or even infantile traits often to be observed in the behavior of artists are the consequence. To make his lot bearable and the patron's reasonable, the artist's exceptional status has to be presumed.

Although this is commonest in the plastic arts it is observable also in music, where teaching offers at best an irritating and difficult livelihood; and in literature, too, though it is the most fortunate of the arts in its possibilities of side earnings. Thus a generally abnormal economic situation for the artist produces abnormal psychological attitudes toward art. One of these might be characterized as "The Classic or Nothing!"

Those who do business in the products of art, have made no effort to change this condition; they have preferred to exploit it. For example, in literature to which, from here on, I will mainly refer, it has been exploited in this country by the hardcovered book. The cloth binding symbolizes and presumes permanence; it distinguishes the book from the magazine, which is sold at a fraction of the cost. To help rationalize the cost differential every book is promoted as at least a candidate classic.

A certain popular author whom it would be generous to call "mediocre" was advertised by his publishers as "the American Balzac." And best-sellers become works of "genius" by convention just as, on ceremonial occasions, the machine politician becomes a "statesman" and the rut-hugging manufacturer an "industrial pioneer."

Since book advertizing in the review media has made reviewing and publishing a symbiotic relationship, the accommodating reviewer (and he is in the majority) also feels the compulsion to avoid all suggestion that the mediocre book is mediocre, and to allot it a candidate classic stature. And in this there is a certain consumer complicity since readers feel freer to enjoy mediocrity that carries such critical endorsement. The reaction against this among "independent" critics is a reverse compulsion.

Reviewing in the "little magazines" they indulge in violent offensives against mediocrity which they tend to see in everything intelligible.

Good cause groups help to fix this attitude. If a book is considered favorable to the cause, the review in their press generally seeks to augment its authority and influence, again by according it the rank of classic.

(2) *Poetry and Mediocrity*

A generation ago a new list by an established publishing house was sure to carry from two to a half-dozen poetry titles. This had been the practice even before the "Poetry Renaissance" of the twenties when poetry almost became popular reading. Today, with the Renaissance drooped into a Decadence, the publisher's list that contains any poetry titles at all is the exception.

I would not attribute this decline entirely, or even largely, to the fear of mediocrity, but that fear has certainly contributed much to the decline.

For an almost laboratory demonstration the reader might spend half an hour within view of the poetry shelf of any bookshop that risks space on that dubious merchandise. This is what he is likely to see.

An unattended shelf. The clerks, naturally, are to be found where the traffic is denser. If a potential customer appears he gets a long distance appraisal from the clerk's eye. If he picks up one of the slim volumes of new verse and shows interest, the clerk turns aside. "Must be the author," he says to himself.

But if it is a brief and wavering look and the potential customer puts the slim volume back on the self and hovers, then the clerk shows interest. The gesture marks him as the typical prospective purchaser of poetry—too timid to buy new verse not yet certified as classic. The clerk hurries over, talks up his editions of the masters, the corpulent "Collected" Shelleys and Brownings and Byrons, the portable museums called anthologies. The Classic or Nothing!

This situation makes the writing of poetry appear to be an almost functionless exertion like the whirling of a wheel off the ground. To feel contact again most poets are writing prose.

Recently a posthumous volume of verse appeared as a memorial to a poet who had made but a small mark soon to be erased. The book was pleasant, readable—and mediocre. A poet friend of the deceased contributed the preface which stopped just short of admitting the mediocrity of the verse and turned, with relief, to the author's personal virtues. If the reading of poetry were permitted to be a pleasure, it would have been in order to praise the verse for its readability.

But that definitely was out of order. Most reviewers were ceremonially kind to the dead and invented distinctions for him. Others, however, treated its publication as a major scandal and pictured the preface writer as the publisher's accomplice in a literary crime.

With such faint praise and stentorian disapproval I am sure that few readers dared purchase a copy. Yet many might have enjoyed the deft though undistinguished versifying and the banalities that it did no harm and perhaps even some good to repeat.

If they disregarded the reviewers and purchased the book anyway some probably behaved with it as did a friend whom I "caught" on a train reading a volume of "mediocre" verse. He had turned the jacket over on the blank side. He blushed when I came upon him, stammered and took a long time enunciating the four words of the title when I asked it. He could not have been more embarrassed had it been pornography. His interest in the book, he protested, was purely scientific, research to account for the sinister popularity of the author who had incurred suspicion by going into a second printing.

(3) *Distinction as Personality*

Possibly my friend had enjoyed reading the book. But enjoyment so furtive is itself abnormal; and if it has to continue so furtive is dropped, sooner or later, for less toilsome pleasures.

Were poems graded like eggs one could conform with the "good taste" that makes it *de rigueur* to read masterpieces only. But if, at one rarefied level, the poet is conceded to be a master, on another and still more rarefied altitude he is rejected as a mere near miss. The Classic or Nothing! To escape the humiliation of being caught with less than classic poetry the reader ends by never being caught with poetry at all.

For poets the avoidance of mediocrity has become a compulsion as strong as self-expression and, indeed, has become identified with it. How to avoid mediocrity? Banality is only too intelligible; down with intelligibility! Every Tom, Dick and Harry has feelings; down with feelings!

And what veiled, timid, frigid things have taken the place of meaning and emotion! Much of the poetry of the past decade reads like scratches on frost. The thaw is overdue.

Looking further back the poetry of our time exhibits some disconcerting spectacles. All nuance or all explosion—spectres or monsters! One "tendency" is a procession of ghosts uttering significant, small sighs and giving significant flicks to the corners of their sheets. Another "tendency" resembles a Chinese dragon parade. The papier mache shells are convincingly dragonish. But, for that very reason, the just visible little human feet that propel them look all the more absurd.

In the early twenties these tendencies were enlivening insurgencies. In the late twenties they ruled. Eliot, Cummings, Pound, Stein triumphed over Lindsay, Sandburg, Kreymbourg, Masters—poets who, to communicate the better, were not afraid to appear commonplace or even banal.

It was a Pyrrhic victory. When poetry put on its Gorgon face people turned aside.

Moreover, there appears to be a psychological analogue of the chemical law of the attraction of opposites. The precious Eliot is magnetized by the ritual banalities of church and court, and the vulgarities of Kipling! Gertrude Stein, eager to communicate her paltry political ideas, takes to common speech in that exclusive cultural journal, *The Saturday Evening Post.* And Ezra Pound, as American mouthpiece, spews gutter banalities of the demagogue—Mussolini.

As with writers so with readers; the mediocrity avoided on the direct route is reached by the detour. A woman of my acquaintance who will not touch an ordinary current book until it is triple-guaranteed a masterpiece, is an omnivorous reader of mystery stories. Thus the exotic snacks to which her other reading is restricted is balanced off by barrels of mediocre mysteries.

The standards of such finicky readers are likely to reduce to various synonyms of novelty. As novelty stales into the banal, as its "gimmick" is exposed, the sting of being cheated is added to the annoyance of being bored.

There have been other ironies in the situation, other ways in which the rush to avoid mediocrity tripped the runner headlong into it. Now Joyce, now Eliot, now Hopkins, now Kafka are the roads of escape, and each, in turn, is crowded with refugees from the mediocre; and inevitably, the law of averages reasserts itself. Mediocrity is reëstablished—the novelty ends as the mode.

Those who have followed these matters closely, have witnessed new carnages of blown-up frogs—the casualties that have always accompanied changes in esthetic fashion.

(4) *Innovators and Devotees*

The esthetic recoil from the mediocre is a form of the aristocratic recoil from the people. This is clearly seen in the effort of privileged mediocrity to fix itself in an artificial distinction. "High society" everywhere furnishes examples. The most astonishing, perhaps, was the courtier literature of medieval Japan. There the classic or nothing obsession reached its probably furthest known extreme.

This literature was restricted to a classic and dead language; but not dead Japanese—dead Chinese! To master it required leisure that only the courtiers had. Its acquisition added another useless accomplishment by which this aristocracy set itself apart.

Though the women of the court might learn this language they were not required to. It was permissible for them to write in the vernacular—the inferior language for the inferior sex!—with the ironic consequence that prose classics of that male-fixated nation, Japan, are largely the work of women!

The long sway of Latin in the West had a related motive—to preserve the priest caste in a privileged position. The Dark Ages were dark for, among other reasons, the fact that intellectual activities were carried on in the murk of a dead language.

In our own day the straining for intellectual distinction is often an expression of class snobbism. Many of the writers who have turned away from the people, in the literary means they have used, have proved to be anti-democratic in their politics. The cases of Eliot and Pound have already been noted.

Thus some literary "insurgents" became political Tories. This strange reconciliation of opposites was not limited to their politics or even to the content of their work. It appears, often, in its formal structure as well. They make their literary debut as innovators; they end as "ancestor worshippers."

(5) *Tradition and "The Classic Or Nothing"*

When we think of tradition as the continuity of culture we call it the "living tradition." But we often think of tradition in another sense in which it would be proper to call it "dead," or at least "inert," though we are too respectful to do so. In that sense tradition is made up of the salvaged treasures of the past, assembled and guarded in shrines, museums and libraries, the "cultural heritage" amassed through the centuries. Thus understood, tradition potently reinforces the "classic or nothing" concept, and it becomes the artist's function to add "genuine" or "sterling" artistic treasure to the heritage. The mediocre, as not meeting the assay standard, is of course ruled out.

There would be some point to this if the treasure were actually circulated. In fact, however, the "heritage" is little enjoyed outside of music. Even there the audience that makes continuous resort to it is quite small compared with the vast audiences of the dance bands performing the music of the day. In other fields the classic is of considerable—if often questionable—concern chiefly to a small group of "collectors" and "authorities." To the rest it is of minor importance compared with contemporary production, whether mediocre or worse.

In this country (and I doubt if matters are appreciably better elsewhere) there is so little recourse to the heritage that a successful repertory theatre is yet to be established. The "cinema classics," for most people, do not exist even as a concept; those who get to see them in the meagre chain of tiny revival houses constitute a fraction of one per cent of the total movie audience. And the repetition of a radio program, for artistic reasons, is so rare as to be a phenomenon. As for books, where next to music, classics are come by most readily, it is probable that the voluntary reading of old books compares to the reading of new books as one hundred to one.

(6) *The Whole And The Part*

In making a point one usually stretches it a bit; and it receives further stretches from one's readers. To counteract unintended but probable exaggerations I stop here to say that I value the classics. The place and function of the mediocre is consistently misjudged; but, by definition, it is lower in stature and value than the classic. My purpose is not to pull the classics down to give their place to the mediocre: but to indicate that a culture is a whole thing; that it is unrealistic to restrict one's consideration of it to one level; and that such a restriction, in practice, may be harmful. Here are some additional illustrations.

Immortality is not exclusive to the classic. Children play games that were played in ancient Athens. The mediocre has a certain immortality though it is anonymous. Even despised and ignored forms of human expression have continuity and tradition. For example, the few scholars who have explored or acknowledged their explorations of the smutty story have established the antiquity of the form and its complex development.

Secondly, influence seems to flow more easily at the lower levels. Swift, Defoe, Fielding, Sterne, Blake are greater masters than Addison, Steele, Johnson, Gray and Goldsmith. But in the post-Restoration literary generations it was the latter who were the models. Their influence largely accounts for the "Genteel Tradition" that kept American culture under restraint, until recently, in literary Sunday clothes.

Finally, without a circulation among its parts, culture is in an unhealthy condition. This was emphasized during the simultaneous advance of nationalism and democracy in Europe. The search for a national cultural heritage and the new respect for the people brought a new attitude to the formerly overlooked folk arts. This operated most directly in music. Folk music was appreciated for itself and its use as a source by the masters was acknowledged. The "treasures" added to the "musical heritage" by Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Haydn, Handel, Tchaikovsky, not to speak of the avowed musical nationalists like Smetana, Moussorgsky, Grieg, were shown to have been worked frequently from folk music.

Something similar is happening almost before our eyes in this country. In the sense of assay "treasure" America still has no musical tradition. For generations we have been turning to the "treasures" of other countries, and to their conductors and performers as well. But with the new national cultural self-esteem and self-assertion that came to us after the first World War we sought and found a national musical tradition of our own, a compound of Negro, regional and occupational music that, as fused into jazz, speedily became an international influence. Indeed European composers found it so rich a source they turned to it, for a time, with greater eagerness than our own composers. Since it has been drawn upon as a source, an American music, even in the "heritage" sense, has at last come into being.

This is a living example of the truth that culture is healthiest when there is an interfunctioning of its parts, when it is not restricted to glass-case "treasures."

(7) *The Great Audience*

"To have great poets," Whitman said, "we must have great audiences too." But Whitman's own case was a proof that the appearance of masters is not to be accounted for so simply.

There is always, to trust audience complaints, a dearth of contemporary masters. Yet there is no perceptible turning away from contemporary mediocrity to substitutes from the "literary heritage." Similarly, great audiences have been presumed to exist in the past and are anticipated in the future—but are never on hand *now!* From the evidence in their prologues, the Elizabethan dramatists did not consider themselves blessed in their audiences. And during the Irish Renaissance the public was readier to stone than to applaud its great writers.

As for the anticipated great audience of the future, the hopes are based on the myth that there is an immortal public constantly refining its tastes and maturing its judgments, and somehow averting the coarsening effect of a competitive environment and the enfeeblements of age.

But there is not and has never been such a public. At any given time it contains the immature at one end, and the senile at the other. It also shows different levels of education and different degrees of interest and different religious or political biases that limit range of choice and predetermine response; different conceits of taste and different social and psychological needs—and so on. Thus there is not one public but many. While, theoretically, the great book has something to which all respond, in practice, in contemporary work, response is on the more traversable lower levels. Towards classic literature the response often turns out to be not a response, really, but a submission, a submission to long accumulated authority and prestige.

Let us take the example of Stendhal who prophesied that he would be understood, finally, a hundred years after he died. This has often been cited to justify an artist's independence of his own public. It was even declared that such a hibernation is good for an artist's work, a mellowing process.

If Stendhal actually believed this, if it was not merely his consoling rationalization, we have only to look around us to see how mistaken he was. For we have the advantage over Stendhal of being able to examine his posterity. It has shown itself no fitter than his own to respond to him, by the fizzling of several Stendhal revivals—assuming a wide reading of the author to have been objective. His posterity, it is true, has more or less assimilated Freud and can therefore understand, a little better, Stendhal's insights into abnormal psychology. But it has also assimilated Hollywood, Hearst and radio, hardly the proper conditioning to appreciate the Stendhalian subtleties.

I am convinced that had Stendhal's works appeared in his own time, instead of posthumously, they would have been understood better by his contemporaries than by us. The elements in his work, which we are supposed to have caught up with, are his anticipations of Freud. Because of our contemporary interest in depth psychology, we now promote these as his chief distinctions. But they are only a part of Stendhal's work; and not the all-important part. Such anticipations occur throughout pre-Freudian literature. If Stendhal's literary claims were to stand on that alone he would have the status of a literary curiosity, not of a master.

Stendhal's work is a varied and complicated product, wrought by a sharply perceptive and individual mind, from the beliefs (both in assent and dissent), the attitudes, the conventions, the material conditions, the social relations, and so on that made up the life of his time. What we have lost by receding from that time more than offsets our catching up in psychological knowledge.

Communication between a writer and his contemporary audience is close and rich because of innumerable common associations. Valuable as the classics are for most readers they cannot, except among the highly educated or by more than normal application, be as easily assimilated as contemporary work. Consequently, for all the undoubted superiority of the classics, contemporary work, even the mediocre, is the preferred reading.

That is why, too, if a classic in a foreign or a dead language becomes important to a new literary generation, a new translation is likely to be made. For the classic is desired in the contemporary social as well as verbal idiom. Chapman's, the Elizabethan Homer, Pope's, the Restoration Homer, Lang's, the Victorian Homer, and T. E. Lawrence's, the Modern Homer, read like four different poets. Read comparatively, they tell us as much of these English societies, as of ancient Hellas.

Whatever we may say of the timelessness or universality of the classics, two concepts which have only an approximate and relative truth, our relations with the classics contain elements of compulsion. Even after school their authoritative presence in anthologies, on lists, in references and quotations tends to put a compulsive urgency into their reading. They are good reading, of course; and the involuntary reading frequently becomes voluntary; but it is fully satisfactory reading, in most cases, only if we bring to it a sort of unconscious translation of associations—a trouble which we don't have to take with our contemporaries.

People are more relaxed, react more comfortably and directly toward the contemporary. And, though the general reading public may collaborate with advertizing man and reviewer in deceiving themselves that it is not so—the greatest reaction occurs, necessarily, within the wide range of the mediocre.

Even our reading of the classics tends to be in those books which circumstance returns to comparative contemporaneity, like the revival of interest in Machiavelli that accompanied the rise of fascism; or books which are contemporary with growth periods as some romantic classics happen to be with adolescence. Past art, at times, has become fully contemporary under special circumstances, as when Renaissance Italy, through its advantageous central position in the "great world" of the Mediterranean, was the first to outgrow clerical, medieval culture, became ready for a lay culture, and found one conveniently at hand in the relics of Greece and Rome.

(8) *The Mediocre Present—The Classic Past*

Since few masterpieces win immediate recognition in their time and fewer still win general acceptance, the contemporary usually seems mediocre. (I am not speaking, of course, of the advertizer-reviewer classics which wane with the advertising appropriation.) Consciousness of contemporary mediocrity is intensified by the comparisons habitually made of the mediocre present with the classic past—or with the fine future, conceived by our desires.

A moment's thought should remind us that the past is discerned only through its specially durable or specially treasured relics; that medieval people, for example, saw infinitely more of the hovel than the chateau, though only the chateau is left for *us* to see. Another moment's thought should tell us that our own mediocre present was an older generation's visioned fine future. But such moments' thoughts are seldom taken. Our comparisons with the better past, or the better future, usually imply a self-identification with it, and have the purpose of insinuating a personal superiority over present mediocrity.

(9) *The Mediocre—Good Or Bad*

Thus the contemporary is confused with the mediocre and the mediocre is confused with the bad. It takes a mental effort to understand the mediocre as merely mediocre. It takes a still greater effort to understand that the mediocre may be good—as the common man is often good; that when it is bad it may be not because it is mediocre but because it incurs a general degeneration. In corrupted societies like that of the Roman Empire or the fascist states of our time, the mediocre book, like the common man, exhibits the general corruption.

The rational object of attack, then, is the evil that has polluted the sources of the communal life. Attacks on mediocrity, as mediocrity, are pointless.

This indicates responsibilities the critic has seldom recognized, seldom accepted, and very rarely met with any efficacy. It is not so important for the critic to identify the latest masterpiece. It is much more important for him to use a book—and for this purpose the mediocre is often better suited—to evaluate the contemporary culture, to analyze its characteristics, its deficiencies, its values that may be extended, its foci of decay, its reflections of social strain and change.

(10) *The Critic's Job*

In considering the social role of culture, criticism has oscillated between two poles. One has been conformity to prevailing authority, lay or secular, with the criticism frequently serving as an instrument of indirect censorship.

The other pole has been a repudiation of authority. So extreme has this repudiation of authority sometimes been as to involve repudiation of the artist's social function. The theory used to rationalize it is that the artist is autonomous, or at most an uncommunicative neighbor minding his own superior business. Criticism based on this assumption abets an absurdity. The very fact that art is made to be seen, heard or read, predetermines a social relationship.

So we have two trends, one in which art and its accompanying criticism promote conformity with prevailing authority, and another in which art and its accompanying criticism dissociate themselves from society. The latter have been indulged, even to the point of bourgeois-baiting, for two incidental services to the controlling social groups. Indulgence of artistic irresponsibility fosters an atmosphere in which all "enterprise" can more easily evade social controls. And where art and criticism recoil far enough away from life, the close observation which might arouse cries for change, becomes impossible.

It should be one of the tasks of the critics to examine the relations between art and surrounding society. Is that society cordial or hostile to art, and why? Does it stimulate or inhibit production, and why? For this the literary critic must also be a social critic. Most of the critics who have made usable contributions, from Aristotle on, have been social critics.

Criticism at least implies a program, as every work of art implies it. Except in the self-alienating programs of the extreme *avant garde,* a plank common to all *esthétiques* is the demand for a more respected and central rôle in society for culture. It is this that brings artists and critics into a community of interest with progressive movements which propose, through a greater diffusion of education and access to cultural opportunities, to make culture a larger and closer part of the life of the whole people. That is why writers and artists are oftener to be found on the Left than on the Right.

But there has always been, in their concept, what might be called their "escape clause." There has always been the thought that, if the writer escaped the mediocre, produced universally acknowledged "art" then he would be absolved from social responsibility; then he could make a triumphant entry from the periphery to the center of the social group on his own terms. For the critic the comparable achievement would be the "discovery" of a genius.

(11) *New Tools For the Critic*

But there has always been far more for the critic to do than make "discoveries," and the load has been increasing. Never did the critic have greater responsibilities. With the spread of general education, providing a vastly enlarged literate public, writing has changed from a gentleman's avocation to a profession; and reading from an upper class accomplishment to a universal resource. And these developments continue. Radio and movies have intensified the professionalization of the writer, developing new attitudes which make the young writers of the forties appear to those who were the young writers of the twenties, something like the functional men from Mars. Movie-money, radio money, book club money, reprint money—these are influences as strong as Eliot or Kafka.

There have been corresponding changes in audience attitudes. Except where the Catholic Church still acts to "contain" the new influence, the public turns to the writer (on the screen and over the air waves as well as in print) for guidance formerly taken from religion and tradition.

A girl's hairdo can tell you what film she has seen, an infant's name what best-seller the mother has read. If you observe people through an emotional crisis you will probably be startled how much their "scenes" are plagiarized, from remembered books, plays or movies.

To encompass this expanded area and added functions of literature, the critic must extend his own range. Merely to hand out ratings has become insufficient.

Nor can the critic plead a lack of new tools for the new tasks. Two versatile new tools are at his hand—historical materialism, commonly called Marxist criticism, and depth, or Freudian, psychology.

With the first he can study the social inter-relationships of the author which have conditioned his outlook and his interests; with the second he can observe emotional sources of character. Using both he can determine where and how personal conflicts transform into class and other social conflicts, and vice versa.

The first wielders of a new tool are overenthusiastic. They often drop everything else in their kits and use the new tool as a fix-all. Neither the Marxian nor the Freudian tool can replace textual analysis and literary evaluation. On the other hand, used together with the old, as ever more specialized tools are used, together, in all good craftsmanship, they can greatly extend the range and deepen the penetration of the whole critical technique.

For example, the work of F. Scott Fitzgerald has long presented an unsolved critical problem. His best book was *The Great Gatsby* though he reached greater heights in the later novels—*Tender Is The Night,* which breaks up in the middle, and *The Last Tycoon,* which he left unfinished. Textual analysis alone could not show why and how a maturing artist, in greater control of his medium, fell below an earlier achievement.

It was not till the publication of *The Crack-Up,* the poignant memorial volume issued after Fitzgerald's death, that the problem began to come clear. *The Crack-Up* contained material directly workable by the new tools, and in turn made the whole body of Fitzgerald's writing workable. It included a series of articles by Fitzgerald describing the nervous breakdown that had stopped his work. This was amplified by other pieces and by a selection from his letters. Together they disclosed an unresolved emotional conflict which had partial foundation in economic insecurity and class antagonism. The psychological trap in which Fitzgerald was gyrating had literary reflections in the traps in which those autobiographical projections, his characters, were similarly gyrating. Further analysis showed this to be a developing pattern, already evident in his first books. And, significantly, the pattern was of a poverty-haunted mediocre man driving himself into an illusion of security in "greatness."

The new tools might explore other examples and further analyze attitudes toward mediocrity, to disclose neurotic disquiet and social imbalances behind them.

(12) *Determinants of Greatness*

The aversion to mediocrity takes one, by implication, upon a quest for the exceptional, what we commonly call "greatness." About that our notions are almost as confused, though not quite as hypocritical, as about mediocrity.

Greatness is social. It is something which commands social recognition by having a more than ordinary effect upon others. If modesty in a man prevents his greatness from being exerted in the community that modesty is morbid. The greatness that it kills has no more reality than the flower in the dead bud.

Certain public activities, particularly the arts, automatically have greatness associated with them. Two published books, for example, automatically rate a *Who's Who* listing for the author. Well-advantaged people, officials and men of wealth, turn to authorship, personally or by ghost, to assure themselves of this documentary "greatness."

In literature greatness may be broken down into three types which generally occur in combination.

There is the greatness of natural gifts, sonorities and verbal dexterities like those of Swinburne and Poe.

Then there is the greatness we think of when we add the adjective "mad" to "genius," greatness as a psychological distension.

To express emotion one must feel it, and in making this his function, the artist must, more or less, overdevelop his sensibility. In that respect he is analogous to the athlete with overdeveloped muscles or the opera singer with overdeveloped lungs. Sometimes this overdevelopment has a special source like that of Dostoievsky's guilt feelings toward his murdered father or Hart Crane's homosexuality.

One consequence is that personal emotional conflict or suffering has been taken to be the true and sole source of art. The best known recent restatement of this theory is Edmund Wilson's *The Wound And The Bow,* a title taken from the Greek legend of Philoctetes, whose suppurating wound made him unbearable but whose archery was needed by the Greeks to ensure victory.

But not all artistic sensibility is pathological in origin; as I have suggested, it may be a functional overdevelopment. If that is pathological then all civilization which, through such overdevelopment of human capacities, has enabled man to multiply his comforts and pleasures and prolong his life is pathology; and biological evolution, which has proceeded by specialized adaptations, would be all pathology.

Art that does not much transcend the "gift," as in Swinburne; or that does not much transcend the "wound" as in Huysmans, is a limited art. Both "gift" and "wound" or, at least, the awareness that is sensitized like a wound, are generally part of the greatest art. But the quality that would seem to characterize the greatest art, is self-fulfillment.

Self-fulfillment in itself does not constitute greatness. Some very humble and happy people would otherwise be among the great. But where there is self-fulfillment in a social activity, particularly in the arts, it proves, on analysis, to be the liberating source of the greatness.

(13) *Self-fulfillment*

Self-fulfillment is never complete. Even comparatively complete self-fulfillment is rarer than the prodigy; and when we try to analyze it it proves to be more complex than pathology. Huysmans, for example, is a simple case compared to Tolstoy.

Fulfillment is so rare because its frustrations begin when we are born. A disfiguring birthmark may set up lifelong inhibitory reticences and resentments. Or the child may be born a Negro, a Jew, or poor. Or an older child may resent him and stand in his way; or a younger child may displace him and inflict neurotic wounds. Or debilitating illness may come or unhappy love or crippling accident or any one of a dozen other handicaps.

All these are only a meagre reflection of the same process going on in nature, which is not organized to fulfill any *individual.* In fact one of the reasons for man's undertaking the "conquest of nature" is his rebellion at being sacrificed, as an individual, by nature. A typical "conquest" is longer life expectation; and "sages" have disappeared from modern life because survival beyond the twenties has ceased to be a distinction.

Nature's care is for the species. Nature's ratio of the expendable would make a "blood and guts" general seem squeamish. Nature wastes thousands of seeds in seeing to the germination of one; and, of the germinated plants, all but a few are eaten, trampled, blown down, seared, flooded, blighted, crowded out. Perhaps one tree in a forest fulfills its potentialities.

When the greatness in self-fulfillment is examined it may seem to be that paradox, great mediocrity, for often it appears to be the fulfillment of an ordinary man. And there are historical moments, like Revolution, or Renaissance, when the bars are down, the inhibitions drop away, when a country seems to swarm with talent, when ordinary men act with the decision and freedom of heroes.

(14) *The Quest For Fulfillment*

Fulfillment is striven for on two levels. One is that of the daily, competitive, individual drive for "advancement." On that level fulfillment is sought against or at the expense of others.

On the other level fulfillment is sought in common. In the interest of general betterment men combine in "movements," or "parties." Or working individually, as an artist or a scientist, use their work to promote self-fulfillment in common fulfillment.

These opposed drives confuse popular attitudes toward greatness. There is the personal and sometimes unadmitted admiration and envy of the "greatness" that commands personal wealth, power or attention. That view of greatness is illustrated in every day's news, in exposed swindles or crimes, in things done merely to get one's name in the papers. And there is the generally avowed but sometimes unfelt admiration and gratitude for the greatness that is a social contribution. And an infinity of gradations and combinations of the two.

If the first seems to hold sway it is not an evidence of eternal human perversity. We know of nobler times, of Revolution and Renaissance, when even mediocre men had high ambitions. When ambitions are mean the society has become corrupted. If a Republican politician today would rather be Coolidge than Lincoln; if quicker envy is stirred today by the currently notorious divorcée than by Madame Curie, it is not solely the corruptible nature of man, but the corrupting conditions of contemporary life, that can explain it.

Literature illustrates the opposed types of greatness in their interflowing diversity. There are exploitations of "style" as aggressive as a Hollywood makeup; but one can point to acts of devotion as heroic as the risks of life in laboratories that make the history of science man's greatest epic.

Self-fulfillment can never be more than comparative or partial. And it is never far—as indeed all life is never far—from neurosis. Tolstoy, whose greatest works seem clearly the product of self-fulfillment, was under neurotic tension in youth and again after he reached middle age. But when his greatest work was written he was enjoying serene family life, happy in his children and his social position, unconstrained and loving toward his wife and she toward him.

A very large part of the greatest writing would prove, I believe, to be the product of comparative self-fulfillment. It is marked by the vigor of unchecked force, or by a brightness like that in the cheeks of a confident youth, that vanishes in the blush or pallor of tension.

Mark Twain's work, in itself, disproves what accumulated biographical evidence is disproving, that he suffered much, psychologically, from the domestication attempted by his New England wife.

The fact that so large a proportion of writers come from the better placed classes is evidence that fulfillment, through literature, comes easier at the economic levels where all fulfillment comes easier. Writers from the working class, like Jack London and Maxim Gorky, one a suicide and the other a consumptive frequently, during his struggling first years, at the point of suicide (he made one actual attempt), are testimony, from the other side, of the correlation between opportunity and fulfillment.

(15) *Fulfillment and Democracy*

This brings me to my conclusions. Mediocrity is an inescapable condition of life. Even "golden ages" have not elevated the majority out of it. But they have raised its level and man's best hope lies in that. In raising its level we can keep making available to more and more individuals the chief and happiest constituent of greatness—self-fulfillment.

Every human being has an individuality that can be made socially effective. Therefore, given favorable conditions, everyone can achieve what is best in what we now know as greatness! We would then have that paradox—great mediocrity. The level of what would then be greatness would be towering indeed, since inequalities of natural endowment and conditioned development would continue.

Complete self-fulfillment is visionary. But ever increasing fulfillment is a natural and constant goal; and it is to carry it on that social inequalities and economic frustrations are ever under attack. That goal has inspired every democratic movement from the earliest tribal dissents to modern communism. The risks and conflicts of life are too many to hope that mankind will get very close to the goal. But a society in which one man in five came close to fulfilling himself would be more fortunate than any previously known.

This is the chief incitement to man's "conquest of nature." Even the literary critic can make the steps to it a little easier. He can do it by making part of his work a study of the social imbalances and the emotional imbalances, as revealed in the books he reads, that are frustrating man's self-development.

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